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Hugh Nissenson The Groom on Zlota Street

Charles Causley Two Poems

Angus Stewart The Stile

Tony Tanner The Golden Bowl

Lawrence Toynebee Some Notes on the
Painting of Contemporary Games

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NEW SERIES

EDITED BY
ALAN ROSS

The London Magazine

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HEINEMANN

The Groom on Zlota Street

In the first decade of the century, when he was twelve years old, my father, his parents, and his cousin Yecheil all lived in a little shop on Mila Street in Warsaw where my grandfather made carriage whips. Just across the way was the entrance to a Russian military barracks, a huge grey stone building with an iron gate that was always guarded by two armed sentries whose hobnailed boots rang out on the cobblestones as they paced up and down at their posts. Every morning, just after dawn, the boy peered breathlessly through the cellar window in order to be able to give Yecheil the signal that the soldiers were at the opposite end of the street and it was safe for him to leave the shop and peddle the whips all over the city.

‘Now, David?’

‘Not yet,’ said the boy and Yecheil yawned, slipped the pack off his back, and rubbed his narrow shoulders where the straps had already begun to cut into them. ‘Did they hurt you very much yesterday?’

‘No, no.’

‘I’ll never understand it.’

‘What?’

‘If the soldiers keep pulling your beard, why don’t you shave it off?’

There was no answer. The boy knew that he might as well have saved his breath. For as long as he had known him, Yecheil had made no concession to modernity. He dressed in a gaberdine and skullcap, his ritual locks curled behind his ears, and a razor had never touched his beard. But with a beard like that the boy couldn’t see the difference. It looked as if Yecheil had shaved anyway, or worse—begun without finishing the job. For some reason he was unable to grow any hair on his cheeks. It grew in black tufts on his lower jaws, and beneath his chin, accentuating his sharp cheekbones, and long naked face.

‘I have to go toward the Prospect this morning. Tell me—the one on the right, what does he look like?’

‘I think it’s the same one as yesterday,’ said the boy.

‘Are you sure?’

'Yes,' said David, but it was a lie. He was never able to tell one of the soldiers from the other. From that distance, and looking up as he did from just above the level of the street, their features were always indistinct and somehow generalized into bristling black moustaches and shaven chins. They wore long black coats with flaring skirts belted at the waist, and their lambskin caps made them seem even taller than they were, not men at all, as far as the boy was concerned, but giants left over from that time recorded in the Bible when giants roamed the face of the earth and loved the daughters of men.

'The same one,' said Yecheil. 'Is that so? He's not too bad. A Ukrainian by his accent. What's the matter?'

'He's stopped,' said David. 'No, he's started again. He's almost passed the butcher's. Why does he keep looking over here?'

'The Ukrainian, eh?' Yecheil muttered.

'How can I be sure?'

'No matter, it can't be helped,' said Yecheil, slipping on his pack. The tips of the long whips grazed the ceiling. 'Come, smile, why don't you? It makes no difference. God be praised. God provides. There's always the groom on Zlota Street.'

'The who?'

'Did you say your prayers this morning? We must thank Him for that.'

'For what?'

But muttering under his breath, Yecheil was already halfway up the creaking stairs. The boy pressed his cheek against the cold glass and listened to the voices coming faintly from above; his father, giving last-minute instructions, perhaps, or just saying goodbye; his mother, calling out from the kitchen—'ooo'—the last, attenuated syllable of some inaudible phrase. Then, to the clatter of the cracked tin bell, the front door was opened and closed, and David peered up and to the right to catch a glimpse of Yecheil hesitating in the doorway of the shop. With his hands thrust under his armpits, he stamped his feet up and down. The icy wind off the river blowing in gusts from the east, caught at his scraggly beard. 'What's he waiting for? Go on. Go now,' thought the boy. It was either now or never. Across the narrow street the sentry was coming toward him. The thin bayonet fixed to the end of his rifle glinted in the sun. 'O now,' David prayed. 'Please now,' and as if in answer, Yecheil turned toward the right and began to walk, a little sideways, keeping as close as he could to the front of the shops. He passed the cobbler's, and Jacobson the hatter's, whose red-lettered sign hung on one hinge and swung in the wind.

The butcher's was next. Then he was lost to sight, and all that the boy could see of him was his shadow gliding obliquely across the ground. Then that too was gone. He had passed the tailor shop. David raised his eyes to the sentry. The man had stopped.

'But it might be all right. It might be the Ukrainian after all,' he thought. 'I must go up.' With one last glance, aware that he had shouted aloud, he backed away from the window and stumbled up the stairs into the kitchen. Facing the tailor shop, with his legs spread, the sentry had taken the rifle from his shoulder and was holding it in his hands.

'But it's nothing,' said his father.

'Papa, let me go.'

'It's nothing, I tell you; David, be still.'

'Let go of my arm.'

'There's nothing you can do.'

'What are they doing to him?'

'Nothing.'

'Then let me see.'

• 'Be still.'

'Mama!' the boy cried out. 'Mama, make Papa let me go.'

His mother was standing by the wooden tub, her arms wet to the elbow from washing the breakfast dishes.

'Listen to your father. Be quiet. Hush,' she said, drying her hands on her apron, and going to the curtained window to peer out.

'Are they hurting him? Mama? What's happened?'

'They've finished with him,' she said. 'Ah, there, you see? There he goes. He's gotten away. He's running toward the Prospect.'

'Let me see.'

'Abba, it's all right,' she said. 'They've let him go. Let him go.'

'Yes, let go,' said the boy, wrenching himself free and losing his balance.

'Be careful. The tub!' his mother cried.

'Are you all right?' asked his father. 'David?'

'I banged my funny bone.'

'Stand up.'

'Did they hurt him?'

'Sipra,' said his father, 'come away from the window. Let me see the arm, David. Stand up. Stand by me.'

They went to work in the other room where long strips of rawhide hung from

wooden dowels on the walls. The boy had been taught to curry the strips with a sharp, curved knife, scraping them as clean as he could in preparation for his father who attached them as lashes to the end of a bundle of birch rods. There was no stove in the room. In the morning, they moved their bench to be warmed by the sunlight that streamed through the single oval window over the door. In the afternoon, it grew so cold that they could see their own breath. The boy suffered from chilblains. His fingers became red and puffy. It was awkward and painful to handle the knife and he often cut himself. His father worked opposite him, holding the rod between his knees and one end of the lash taut between his strong white teeth. He was a handsome man with wide dark eyes and a curly black beard with streaks of auburn in it—the colour of David's hair. My beard will be like that, a little redder, maybe, but thick too, the boy thought to himself with a twinge of shame for feeling grateful that he didn't take after Yecheil, his mother's side of the family.

'Papa?'

'Unhh?'

'Just for a minute. Take it out of your mouth.'

'How's the elbow?'

'Better, thank you. Papa, I've been thinking. Maybe Yecheil ought to speak to the rabbi.'

'What for?'

'I don't know. If he explained, maybe the rabbi would give him permission to shave off his beard.'

'Are you finished with that strip?'

'Papa?'

'What is it now?'

'Nothing. I'm finished,' said the boy. He should have known better than to even mention it. How could a Jew shave off his beard? Still—no, the boy decided, and in any case, the less said about Yecheil in his father's presence the better. He sensed that his father suffered from the shame of giving in to his wife's fears and, to calm her, swearing on his life never to accompany her nephew to the end of the street in the morning no matter what the soldiers did to him. She was convinced that they would murder her husband as he returned to the shop alone.

At five o'clock they heard the bells of St Stephan's, the church on the next street, calling the Christians of the neighbourhood to Mass. The room was getting dark. It was time to quit. Soon the sun would set and most of the Jewish men on the block would gather in the wooden synagogue on the corner to say

their evening prayers. There were fifteen or twenty of them. The Russian sentries who had begun their night watch an hour before rarely dared to molest them in a group.

'Don't look so worried,' his father said as he left for the synagogue. 'Yecheil will be there. We'll bring him safely home.'

In the kitchen, a pan of fat was cooking on the stove.

'What's for dinner?' David asked his mother.

'Your prayers first,' she said, putting his skullcap on the back of his head.

'What is it? Tell me. Not potato pancakes again! That's the third time this week. Is there any jam?'

But with her head covered by a cotton scarf, and her eyes closed, his mother was already absorbed in prayers of her own. David bowed his head, rocked back and forth on his heels and the balls of his feet, listening to the sputtering fat. The heat of the stove swelled his reddened fingers and made them ache worse than before. He rubbed them together.

'Mama?'

'Finished so soon?'

He hadn't even been able to begin. There were tears in the corners of her eyes. Her lips twitched. For the first time, the boy realized that it had become habitual. Aware all at once of his astonished, stricken glance, she coughed nervously, concealing her mouth behind her hand.

'Oh, Mama.'

She blamed herself. He was sure of it. It had never been so clear to him. Rather than blame God, she took the whole thing on herself—not only her husband's shame, but Yecheil's suffering as well. And in a way the horror was that she was right. It had all begun with an act of kindness on her part, a promise that she had made to her dying sister to provide a home for her unmarried son. Originally from Vilna, left all alone after he had lost his mother in a spotted fever epidemic some six months before, Yecheil had only come to Warsaw at his aunt's invitation. The trouble was that the shop on Mila Street could barely support three as it was. Peddling the whips, submitting to the soldiers, was the only thing that could be found for Yecheil to do.

'Mama, listen to me.'

'Wash your hands and come and sit down.'

'Listen for a minute. You're not to blame.'

'There's a fresh piece of soap in the cupboard.'

'You did your best. How can you think it's your fault?'

'No, no. To the left. That's it. Behind the cups.'

'Are you listening?'

'What is it?'

'Nobody's to blame because there's nothing else we can do.'

'Can you reach it?'

'No.'

'Stand on the chair.'

'Anyway, if Yecheil doesn't mind so much, why should I? Did he ever tell you about the groom on Zlota Street?'

'Be careful.'

'Ask him about that, why don't you?' said David. 'We have to be thankful for what we can.'

But later, as usual, she ate her supper in silence. No one said anything until Yecheil took a huge bite from the last brown cake on the plate, wiped his greasy fingers on his beard, and turned to her husband.

'There's a new stable on Iron Street, did I tell you? I was there for over an hour this morning, talking to the groom. He comes from Vilna too.'

'Is that so? Did he buy anything?'

'He will. He will, absolutely, I'm sure of it. He told me to come back and see him sometime next week.'

'Who bought something today?'

'Tomorrow,' said Yecheil, blowing into his steaming glass of tea. 'Tomorrow will be a good day.'

'Really?' asked David. 'How many whips will he buy?'

'Who?'

'Why, the groom on Zlota Street. Isn't that where you're going?'

'Who told you about him?'

'You did. Don't you remember? This morning.'

'Did I?' said Yecheil. 'Ah, if I want, the groom on Zlota Street would buy them all.'

'What did I tell you? Mama, did you hear?' asked the boy.

He was unable to sleep. For half the night, tossing and turning on the narrow bed he shared with Yecheil in the closet next to the workroom, he lay awake while the mice scampered across the floor and gnawed the scraps of leather under the bench. Tomorrow was Friday, Sabbath eve, when Yecheil usually came home early to go to the *mikveh*, the bathhouse just off Marshalkovska Street, for his ritual bath. 'Dear God,' the boy prayed, 'my Father in Heaven, if it's really true, then let him go to Zlota Street first, and sell all of

his whips.' He blessed the groom, and the stable, and the man's wife, if he was married, and all of their children. 'It's not for me that I ask, I swear it. If the groom buys all the whips, that'll mean five or six roubles at least, maybe more. Think what that will mean to Mama. It will be a sign to her, a miracle to celebrate the Sabbath.' He shut his eyes and tried to imagine his mother's joy at being able to prepare and bless a full Sabbath meal for the family, a real dinner with fish and wine, chopped herring for an appetizer, garlic and chicken fat spread on thin slices of white bread, potato *kugel* and a roast chicken. 'Why, there'll even be enough money left over for Mama to buy flour and bake a cake. A nut cake, mmm, with almonds and raisins. . . . Lord, God of my Fathers, do I have to tell You? You know how much it would mean to her—to all of them. . . . Thou art just. I ask You—no matter what happens, do we ever question that? Be Thou merciful too. . . .'

He had involuntarily spoken aloud. Yecheil stirred, snorted once through his nose, and again lay still, with his face to the wall. The mice squeaked. It was bitterly cold. The boy repeated the prayer over and over. Outside, it had begun to rain, and the hollow drumming on the kitchen window filled the whole house.

'Awake? Good morning,' said his father, standing at the door. A diffused, dirty light flooded the room. David sat up and rubbed his eyes. He was alone in bed.

'What happened? Is he gone?'

'You overslept.'

'When did Yecheil go?'

'Almost an hour ago . . . No, no, it's all right. You needn't look like that. Nothing happened. It's snowing. The soldiers have built a fire by the gate. Would you believe it? They were too busy warming themselves. They didn't even look at him as he went by.'

The boy jumped out of bed and ran to the kitchen window. It was true. His heart leapt. A bonfire blazed in front of the gate, hissing and smoking in the falling snow. The two sentries, with their caps pulled down over their ears, had leaned their rifles against the wall, and were warming their hands.

'They really didn't touch him?'

'Not so much as a glance.'

Again David parted the curtain and gazed out of the window. He could hardly believe it. For the first time in over a week the soldiers hadn't molested Yecheil, and on today of all days. He was afraid to think. Was it a good omen, or what?'

'Did Yecheil say when he'd be back?'

'It's Friday. Early, I suppose,' said his father, and the boy scrutinized his face. He was nibbling on his moustache, his expression a blank. Perhaps Yecheil had said nothing to his parents, intending to surprise them, and then again—the boy shook his head. All through the morning he could hardly keep his mind on his work. Again and again, he pictured the Sabbath table, lit by candles, with its loaf of bread covered by a linen napkin, ready to be blessed. He saw his father, dressed in a clean kaftan, with his beard combed, raise his wine glass, and his mother's smiling face. The roast chicken, simmering in the pan, rose before his eyes. His mouth watered, and then all at once, seized by fear, he raised his eyes to the worm-eaten beams of the ceiling over his head.

'How could I? God forgive me,' he prayed. In his weakness, he knew he had jeopardized everything, revealing to God that he had prayed the whole night through not for the relief of his parents, or the sanctification of the Sabbath, but for the gratification of his own desire. The image of the chicken tormented him. He felt the crisp skin melt on his tongue, the bones crunch beneath his teeth. Try as he would, it was impossible to think of anything else. By noon, he felt exhausted by the effort, and the lack of sleep, and his heart shrank as he heard his mother in the kitchen, scrubbing the floor, already at work on her hands and knees to prepare the house for the Day of Rest. He went in to help her.

'Shall I make a fire?'

'Take off your dirty shoes and move the table out of the way.'

Yes. It seemed to him appropriate to walk on his bare feet, as though on holy ground. He moved the table, and piled all the chairs in the corner and went down on his hands and knees himself to scrub the soapy floor. 'Strength. Give me strength,' he prayed, resisting the temptation to ask his mother what they were going to eat. He fed the fire, and took down the cups to dust the cupboard and slowly but surely, as always just before the Sabbath, the immaculate kitchen calmed his nerves. He could see his face reflected from the pots and pans, the spoons in the drawer. The wooden floor shone. Everything seemed to glow with an inner radiance of its own, setting him at peace.

'Is there anything else?'

His mother shook her head. 'You look tired. Why don't you rest?'

'What time is it?'

'I don't know.'

'Yecheil will be home soon, don't you think?'

'Rest.'

He sat by the stove with his eyes closed, warming his toes, and at first, when the kiss brushed his cheek, and he awoke with the narrow, bearded face almost touching his own, he was sure it was all a dream.

'You're back!' he cried, throwing his arms about his cousin's neck and kissing him on the mouth. 'Is it really you? What time is it? Have I been sleeping again? Where's Mama?'

'She's gone.'

'Shopping?'

'Yes.'

'Papa too?'

Yecheil nodded, drawing up a chair, and the boy smiled. 'How wonderful! Were they surprised? What will they buy, did they say?'

'A whitefish.'

'No herring?'

'Not that I know of. Just a whitefish. Why?'

'But that's just the appetizer. What else?'

'The usual. Potatoes.'

'That's probably for the *kugel*.' He clapped his hands with excitement. 'And?'

'That's all.'

'You can tell me now. What is it? I know anyway. A chicken. Isn't that it? . . . No? What, then? Of course! A brisket. I forgot. Papa likes a brisket better than a chicken any day. Not a brisket either? Then what? . . . Why do you keep shaking your head?'

'Because I don't understand. Where do you think we'd get the money to buy a brisket or a chicken?'

'Then how much money *did* you get?'

'A rouble.'

'For all of the whips?'

'All of them?' Yecheil laughed. 'Ah, I see. You had a dream. No.' He took the boy's hand. 'I was lucky to be able to sell two. It took me all morning to sell two to the stable on Krucvelska Street for fifty kopeks apiece.'

The boy stared at him without comprehending. 'And that's the only place you went?'

'No.'

'Then where else?'

'Let's see. Ah. Danilovichevska. The stable on the corner.'

'But they bought nothing either.'

'They were closed.'

'And that's all.'

'That's all.'

'And Zlota Street?' asked the boy.

'Is that what you thought?'

'It's only what you said you were going to do.'

'No.'

'You did so. Ask Mama. Last night you said the groom on Zlota Street would buy all of your whips.'

'And he would, if I say so, yes.'

'Then why didn't you go?'

'Because,' said Yecheil, 'when I do, the money makes no difference. It . . .' he hesitated, tugging at his beard. 'How can I explain?'

'No, there's no need. I understand.'

'What's this? Before the Sabbath? Tears?'

'No tears. No.'

'Where are you going?'

'Just inside. It's late. If you don't want to be late at the *mikveh*, you ought to go.'

'Wait.'

'For what? I told you. I understand. It's all right. It was childish of me. You had to say something.'

'I told the truth.'

'No. But what's so terrible? I don't mind. I know it's not your fault.'

'Blow your nose.'

'You mustn't speak to me as a child any more. I told you. I understand. It took me a long time, but I do. Yesterday, it was just what I told Mama. It isn't anybody's fault. There's just nothing else that any of us can do.'

'No.'

'Then what?'

'Get your coat,' said Yecheil.

'Why?'

'Here. Button up. Button up. That's it. Haven't you got any gloves? Your hands are red. Where did I leave my whips?'

'Where are we going?'

'For the love of heaven. Will you please wipe your nose?'

In front of the tailor shop, the boy stumbled in the ankle-deep snow. 'Don't stop! Don't stop!' Yecheil shouted, catching him up under the arm, but he

stumbled again. Warming himself by the fire, one of the sentries laughed and shouted something, but the words were carried away by the wind that drove the falling snow down the length of the street. The soldier yelled again and shook his fist, but they had reached the corner. With the low, grey sky and the air filled with swirling flakes, the Prospect was almost in darkness, as though the sun had already set. Here and there a yellow oil lamp burned in a frosted window. They crossed the wide street and headed west. Ghostly figures, sheeted in snow, glided silently by them; a peasant in a fur cap, bent under a load of wood, a man in a military overcoat, with his head shrouded in a hood. As far as the boy could judge, they went west again, along a narrow maze of streets that he had never seen before, between red brick factory buildings whose smoking chimneys blackened the snow with soot. It began to snow even harder, in thick wet flakes that clung to the eyelashes and stuck to their clothes. Yecheil held the boy by the hand. The wind howled in his ears. Half-blinded, unable to see anything but the dim, white shape before him, his thoughts became confused.

'West, or east? Near the river? . . . Who is he?' he wondered. 'Is that the river? Where is he taking me?' He lost all sense of time.

They struggled on until the boy's body was numb and it required all of his will to put one foot in front of the other, and it wasn't until the wind had abruptly died away that he realized that they had entered an enclosed court of a block of flats, and halted once and for all. He wiped his face. There was an outside stairway, with a row of dripping icicles hanging from the iron rail, and to his right, almost directly before him, he could see a double wooden door.

'Your honour!' cried Yecheil, in Polish, but using the Russian form of address. 'Your honour, let us in!'

'Who is it?' came a muffled voice.

'Your honour, open the door!' said Yecheil, pounding on it with his fist. The door slid back, throwing the gleam of a lantern on the drifted snow.

'Who is it?' repeated a man in a leather apron. The falling snow obscured his face. ' . . . The Jew! Don't tell me. The Jew has changed his mind.' He gave a short, delighted laugh. 'Who's that?'

'Only my cousin,' said Yecheil. 'Won't your honour let us in?'

'Come in. Come in, by all means.'

'Thank his honour for his kindness,' said Yecheil.

'I thank your honour,' said the boy.

The huge room, echoing to his voice, smelled of rotting hay and manure. When his eyes became accustomed to the flickering light of a lantern hanging on the wall, he could see a shadowy row of wooden stalls in the rear, with

horses in them. The man before him, thick-set and round-faced, with wide nostrils and watery blue eyes, scratched the shaven nape of his neck with an iron curry comb and grinned.

'What'd I tell you? Didn't I say you'd be back? You don't get an offer like mine every day.'

'It's true,' said Yecheil. 'Your honour is very kind.' The snow in his beard and eyebrows was beginning to melt in huge glistening drops.

'Eh? Well? Then you agree? How many is it to be? How many whips have you got there? Ten? Twelve? I tell you what. I'll take them all. What do you want for all of them?' He jingled the coins in the pocket of his apron. 'Six roubles? Seven?'

'Seven roubles?' asked David in astonishment.

'Look at him, will you? Will you just have a look at that boy!' laughed the groom, jingling the coins again. 'You like the sound of that, eh? Eh? . . . Why, he's positively watering at the mouth. . . . Tsk. Tsk. A real Jew. So young, imagine that, and already a Jew.' He held his sides and roared with laughter. In the rear, one of the horses stomped its hooves.

'I thought—to celebrate the Sabbath,' stammered David, feeling himself flush to the roots of his hair.

'Of course. Of course. What's it to be? You can tell me, after all. What are you going to buy with all that money? . . . I know! A suckling, eh? Eh? Isn't that it? A roast suckling, brown and tender, with an apple in its mouth. . . .'

'Oh. No . . . that is . . . no, no suckling, your honour,' said the boy. 'We're not allowed. . . .'

The man threw back his head and roared again. It seemed to David that a full minute had passed before the echo of the laughter had died away. The restless horse brushed its flanks against the stall. The wall shook and the swinging lanterns made their shadows on the floor sway one way and the other in a slowly diminishing arc.

'Well, what do you say?' said the groom, turning to Yecheil.

' . . . Ten whips.'

'As many as you like.'

'That's ten pulls.'

'You know the offer,' he said, shifting the comb from hand to hand. 'Take it or leave it. Well?'

'Pulls?' asked David.

'Make up your mind. I haven't got all day.'

'Pulls? I don't understand,' repeated the boy.

'His honour has been kind enough to offer to buy a whip for every time I allow him to pull my beard,' said Yecheil.

It was some kind of a joke. The boy was sure of it. He looked from one to the other. The groom, grinning, cleared his throat with a curious, embarrassed air, and Yecheil was smiling too, with his mouth twisted to one side.

'Yes or no?' asked the groom. 'I've got work to do. You're wasting my time.'

'I know. I apologize, and if I may, I must again express my thanks to your honour,' said Yecheil, bowing low from the waist.

The man took a step forward. 'Then it's yes?'

'Ah, I must . . . I . . . no,' said Yecheil. 'No. Perhaps . . . No, not today.'

'No, eh?' said the groom.

Still bent, without raising his eyes, and with a wave of his arm, a gesture for the boy to follow him, Yecheil began to turn towards the partly opened door.

'No?'

The turn was completed. He had reached the threshold and straightened up, but it was too late. The curry comb clanged to the floor and the thick, muscled arm of the groom shot out, all in one motion, one sound, as though an iron bolt had been shot to bar the door. The boy heard the horse snort and stomp again in the stall, and a quick, sharp intake of breath, a little grunt. Crouching down, with his back against the wall and his arms in front of his face, he saw only part of what happened. He only caught a glimpse of the groom's face, the flaring nostrils and watery eyes. There was no malice in them, or even amusement, or delight; a certain dullness, rather, a matter of factness that frightened him even more. It was though he were beating a horse. Holding Yecheil's face up by the beard, his right fist rose and fell. 'No, eh? No, eh? No?' The horse was growing more excited. Again the lantern swayed and the shadows moved back and forth. A whinny filled the air, and the sound of splintering wood.

'Yes, yes,' the groom muttered under his breath. 'In a minute, damn you. One minute more.' David shut his eyes. 'No, eh?' Then there was a silence. He was aware that the groom had grabbed him by the left arm, wrenching his shoulder. Then he was being dragged across the floor toward the door.

They sat for a time in the court, underneath the stairway. The icicles were beginning to melt. It had stopped snowing at last and the darkening sky was beginning to clear, showing ragged patches of yellow and blue in the east, and an occasional ray of the declining sun. From the street came the creak of an

ungreased axle as a horse-drawn cart went by.

'You heard him,' said Yecheil. 'Seven roubles for a few pulls of the beard. . . .' He spoke with difficulty. His lower lip was slit at the corner. His cheek was bruised and his left eye swollen almost shut. 'Ah, I can see it. . . . You still don't understand.'

'You refused,' said David. 'If you refuse, then why do you come?'

'Because he gives me a choice. . . . Yes. . . . Don't you see?' He dabbed at his lip and spat blood.

'Sit down.'

'No, no, it's nothing. . . . And why? For that very reason . . . because I have a choice. I refuse . . . it . . . how shall I say it? I . . . och!'

'Sit down and put some snow on your face.'

'Listen to me!' The shut eye, as though he were winking, gave his face a peculiar, sly expression. 'Listen. . . . You see, you were wrong. . . . There's always a choice to be made.' Again he spat blood and began to cough violently. 'Remember that,' he said, gasping for breath. 'Remember that and rejoice. . . . Rejoice. . . . Praise Him. . . . God provides.'

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Though it is impossible to state the exact amount of the Award for any year, two Awards were made last year of a total of £700.

Charles Causley

THE TEMPTATION OF SAINT DUNSTAN

Blessed Saint Dunstan, master of iron, of arts,
Forger, in fired air, of cross and vial,
Fold now your file of fingers at my trial
Of winter words as the long light departs.

At Candlemas you from the black womb came,
All tapers, save your marvellous mother's, dimmed
Yet leaping from the naked legs you trimmed
Earth's lantern from her unextinguished flame.

Now tonsured, blessed by Elphegus the Bald,
Young Edwi with your poulticed prayers you scald—
That King who inconsiderately lay
With the wreathed harlot on his crowning day.

And when, with tongue of knives, the monks expelling
You on the cautious air your colours telling
Bade Woman and the apple-tree take heed
The figure on the crucifix agreed.

But as you stood within the forge's smoke
Robed in the reverent attitudes of day,
There stepped from the sly, severed air of May
A naked girl with hair her only cloak.

Two bearded devils rested at her brow,
Two devils rested at her ruined eyes,
Two rested at her breast of braided snow,
One where her hand discreetly hid her thighs.

The Blessed Saint, calm as the composed sun,
Saw in that fatal frame the Evil One;
Replaced, with prayer, her seven shells of clothes
And seized with his swift tongs her naked nose.

O but the Evil One with dreadful yells
Now sprang, with smoking skin, to Tunbridge Wells
And drove its nose out of the burning air
Into the chalybeaten waters there.

While in his house of forges Dunstan lay,
Hammered Christ's kingdom from the heavy clay,
Wrote, chastised, painted, walked with God, and died
In the white odours of Ascensiontide.

And still, from the sure sky, as seasons flow
I watch, with Dunstan, the frail flowers of snow,
My cell-door open on my shirt of skin
That all who wish may knock and enter in.

At my tall table, paper virgin-bright,
A sand of silence, sea-lantern alight
That she may land from that shut, sacred ark
With whitsun days of words upon my dark.

O may she come upon this noonday clear,
Unfreeze the drifted heart! See, I have here
The ink's blood, iron pen, the forge well fired
And the sharp tongs that may not be required.

GUY FAWKES' DAY

I am the caught, the cooked, the candled man
With flames for fingers and whose thin eyes fountain,
I send on the stiff air my shooting stare
And at my shoulder bear the burning mountain.

I open on the dark my wound of speeches,
With stabs, with stars its seven last words wear,
My tongue of torches with the salamander
Breeds conversaziones of despair.

Milled in the minted light my skin of silver
Now curls, now kindles on the thicket's bone,
And fired with flesh in sepulchres of slumber
Walks the white night with sparks and showers sown.

At my fixed feet soldiers my coat of carbon
 Slit with the speared sky. Their sacked eyes scan
 My mask of medals. In bright mirrors of breath
 Our faces fuse in death. My name is man.

Robin Skelton

ONCE MORE THE LAURELS

This man who is dead made poems.

Now on his grave

I scatter public leaves, gloss-darkened holly,
 spotted laurel, blue-green ferns of yew,
 woven into a hubless, spokeless, holy
 wheel—the usual dismissive token
 of the turning year, and of completion.

But the Angel sorrowing above stone
 in stone humility his heirs provide
 I give no leaf to; she leans, gravely dressed
 in robes and misery, who should bestride
 this huddle, arms akimbo, out-thrust hips,
 bared breasts, wild hair, triumphant parted lips.

CHOICE MUCH LIKE HOBSON'S

Seeing her in her various disguises,
 broad wife, black-sheathed schoolgirl, swinging tart,
 blonde, brown, lissom, squabby, moist-eyed, dozy,
 how can he tell realities apart
 enough to know which one can fit his crown
 and drag across the stage her blinding curtain?
 Only the unsought, unthought, strange-eyed bitch
 will plague that itch and make his verses certain.

LESE-MAJESTE

Offend her, if you must, with random women,
 drink, drugs, thievery, or lay nations waste—

these she may tolerate as venial, but
once boast of cunning or inflate your taste
into a principle of separate rule,
you'll feel the downturn of that sovereign hand,
and, old or young, cold scholar or hot fool,
will tumble, gaunt and wordy, with the damned.

THE BOUT

Wrestle this angel, and whoever falls
to head-lock, arm-lock, hip-tilt, thrashing thigh,
it is her victory, or none at all;
hers is that last wild conquering plundered cry.

PLUS CA CHANGE

Last night we played the animal. Today
I hear you singing to the children. There,
I think, she goes! It seems I muscled in
on private tunes which, glad to have me share,
you now make free confession of; our feet
were mingled to that sweet barbaric air.

And yet tonight I'll greet, man being brute,
eyes not quite virginal, though make-up chic,
smart shoes, smart handbag, and conspiring grin
boasting the curly fleece this Jason seeks
with hardening muscle, and, as we begin,
will hear the same tune hissing through her teeth.

THE OLD RELIGION

Pale skin, green eyes, red hair—in other days
clearly, and without argument, a witch;
men spoke of midnights naked to the Goat,
with sleepless fancies sweating out their leech,
and even though she died in pond or flame
as consequence, that black religious awe
had more of holy matter in its scabs
than ways our century pays her to play whore.

POSTMARK PARNASSUS: INTERNAL DELIVERY

A private message to a few other
 below-stairs hopefuls in her owl-mad hall
 whose deer-park also boasts wild horses, dogs—
 a whole zoo-full indeed, and whose grey walls
 ledge ravens: you, like me, await election
 to the office of her bed, have lined
 her sheets before; then in Truth's name pretend
 less joy in spittling silver till it shine.

John Fuller

RIDDLES

from the Old English of the Exeter Book

NO. 25

I am of general use, a wonder though
 Especially to one half of the nation
 (Women), harmless unless they prove my foe.
 Stiff in a bed's my shape and situation,
 With secret hairiness somewhere below.

Now and again some pretty girl will try
 To pluck her courage up (and me), her hands
 Around my red skin, pulling my head away,
 Gripping me hard; and this encounter lands
 My pig-tailed wrestler with a dripping eye.

NO. 32

This middle-earth so marvellously betrays
 Its beauty in so many different ways:
 I saw a strange mobile contraption, and
 As it went it screamed and ground the sand.
 It had neither eyes nor hands, this curious creature,
 Neither arms nor shoulders, for the only feature

It might move by was a single foot
Sweeping upon the plains. Its mouth was put
In the middle and its ribs were many.
Useful to man, it helps in carrying any
Food or provisions, and each year one takes
Advantage of the profit that it makes
For people, rich or poor. Now can you see,
You who are clever with words, what this might be?

NO. 37

I've seen this thing: its belly is behind it,
Swollen enormously, and there to mind it
Is a brawny servant who has done his bit
When from its eye flies what has been in it.

After it gives its contents to the other,
This is put back inside it and another
Breath returns: it does not die, but rather,
In giving birth, turns into its own father.

NO. 47

A moth ate words. How strange it seemed to me
When I heard of it, a marvellous oddity!
An insect, like a burglar in the dark,
Hogged both the meaning and the well-made mark.
This thieving stranger learned it does not follow
That we are wiser from the words we swallow.

(Answers on page 96.)

Alexander Baird

YEAR'S END

The nibbling year of the Rat has almost won
Its caucus race from oysters to persimmons

In this region famed for both. The first month's clawprints,
Stars pressed in the snow, with a comet's streak between,
Will soon appear again as the Rat year passes.

Now the cat-calls of kites idling black against blue,
With, from the pines, the high hag-cackle of the shrike,
Speed him, and the panicky roar of the Ox
Kneedeep in mud, who will inherit the new year
But sees the Tiger not fourteen months away.

Though we infest time with our images, hanging
A paper mask on the death's head, bone must last
Like the Ox and Rat beyond the new year's cards
And the Tiger is always a tiger even on paper.

MOON-VIEWING AND PROFESSOR KOU

Yellow, old

Oriental moon on your couch of needles,
You are not beautiful without help of pine
And tall grasses; and that you cannot be mine,
Wrinkled moon no longer intact and never unsung,
But that you seem his coeval makes him bold.

Festival moon, do you

Illuminate Professor Kou in the garden where
He muses upon Wordsworth in his own tongue,
And are you always his inexpressible, true
And national moon? Then does he share
With you the deeper truths he keeps from me?

Grey moon, discover what I may not see.
For either he is wise enough, as I am not,
To read the brush-strokes on your Chinese face—
Or simply he is still unsure of what
I know, and seeks to keep me in my place.

Michael Hastings

ON THE RIDGEWAY

Up on unanimous shoulders,
Raw roar of wind rollers.

Fell, scarp, and tumbleweed,
Thumb's nail of Thames Valley.

By motorcycle, riding
Jockey, on tractor weals

To where, atop, bryony binds
The exaggerate mile.

Clouds above the Ridgeway,
Too at hand to believe.

Trees of apple promise
And cold nips of knife ice.

Sounds, and the ear hums with
Winged totter of birds' eyes.

Almost Spring but for rain,
And kneading green cow-buds.

Chalk in the soil like hip-
Bones, and wet months for wheat.

I could be nowhere else,
But here—dwarfed in landscape.

The handlebarred machine cools
Soft scimitars of heat.

My ride up threw no shadow;
I ride down—the shadow is me.

The Stile

The mirror had a bevelled edge, so that by tilting it carefully he could cut his eye in half quite painlessly. Now he had three eyes and a harelip. He squared the mirror, made a cruel gesture with his mouth, then put his hand down the front of his trousers to see if he had more hair than Falkirk yet. Suddenly he noticed some flecks of scurf that must have fallen on the mirror when he was combing his parting. He began to worry about that instead.

The waiting was intolerable. And yet he knew it shouldn't be. The bed was a secure island where he was immune from time. That was why before going back to school, or before going to the dance as now, he would set aside a whole hour for lying on his bed. It was a rational device for delaying fear. When he panicked, and he had been panicking for more than a week, he could say to himself, 'There is still the hour. There is no excuse for worrying before the hour.' The stratagem never worked, but he still enforced it rigidly because the hour was the time for *thinking*.

Now he felt silly lying on the bed in his blue suit and his ridiculous patent-leather shoes with silver buckles. He strained his ears to hear his mother backing the car out of the garage; all the time his breathing coming faster.

The other thought came back.

He bit his lip and cut his eye in half again with the mirror. He rather wished the down would disappear altogether. Last term had been bad enough. Their voices were still in his ears like trapped bees.

'Morton has a forest!' 'With a waterfall in it!' 'Morton! Morton! Morton!' 'Look at the Jelly Roll!'

'I'm precocious,' he said carefully, and aloud to the ceiling, turning away wearily from the sound of their voices.

He wondered dazedly whether the term after next at his new school everyone would have hairy Dings and it wouldn't matter so much. What if his trousers fell off tonight and all the girls at the dance started shouting. . . . He reversed the mirror quickly, and as an additional safeguard closed his eyes, so that he wasn't. But it was not an easy thing to pretend: in no time at all he was again.

Then what about the doctor at last term's medical inspection? He was still wondering about that.

'Stand up straight much?' the doctor asked, and he began tapping his teeth with the tongue-depressor he had in his hand.

Peter drew himself to attention and said, 'Sir?' They had to call him that; it was good manners.

'Play about a bit?' the doctor said. He seemed absent-mindedly to be cleaning his teeth with the tongue-depressor now; then he stopped that and looked at his fingernails.

'Football practice.' Peter shrugged. 'And camp-fires in the woods mostly.'

Then he left the room for the next boy, wondering why the matron who was usually helping the doctor had disappeared.

They were backing out the car. He panicked. Leaping off the bed he scabbled through his drawers. He must have something in his pocket to show people. To talk about. He grabbed his bullet.

Then he saw his hairbrush. At school boys hit their chests with hairbrushes to look like measles. His hand hovered over the brush. His father would see through it though. It might start him on one of those speeches about, 'When I was a shy lad, Peter-son.' Then his mother would say, 'You're a very pretty little boy, darling, people love you. Be brave, lamb.'

He shuddered, feeling weaker than ever, and made a tough, twisted face into the mirror. He felt its contours carefully, and determined to keep it there all evening. No; he couldn't because he loved Rosemary.

Suddenly he knew he had been thinking about the Ding and the scurf in his hair so as not to have to think of her. His legs might melt away if he thought about her now. They couldn't make him go to the dance though if he suddenly had to walk on his knuckles like the pavement artist outside the National Gallery. He thought about Rosemary, but her picture wouldn't come into his mind. He watched his legs in their sharp trousers, but they only shook like the cotton sails of a Firefly when the wind veered.

In the car he said nothing. His mother was going on to one of her dotty parties, so she was practising dotty remarks on him. She was practising smoking cigarettes too, because she only smoked them at parties.

He had to be casual; even bored about the dance. If his mother knew about Rosemary he would probably have to wear a paper-bag over his head for the rest of his life; if he didn't fall through the floor of the car first and get crushed. He thought about that sort of death for a moment or two.

His fingers moved from pocket to pocket of the stiff new suit until they found the live bullet. If he held it against his head and prayed, or scratched the tiny soft pimple of lead, it might go off. 'Peter is dead,' his mother would have

to say. 'If there are spare sausages and things I expect Rosemary will like them cold for lunch tomorrow.'

He thought about Rosemary's house. It didn't seem to have a real existence in a real place like his flannel in the bathroom, or his bicycle in the shed. He wondered how his mother would find it. Anyway, she didn't seem to be able to keep a car going in a straight line for very long, as other cars he'd been in managed to do. He lurched against the car door, but the bullet didn't go off.

'Tippy taxi,' his mother called happily.

Peter was thrown forward. If he wasn't being pushed about by people he was being bounced around inside cars like a rag doll. Everyone else had the power. He began to feel limp, exhausted, calmer; almost to enjoy alternately having his head banged against the windscreen, and his neck dislocated on the back of the seat. He was a punch-drunk boxer sticking it out. No; a Christian being thrown to the lions.

He tried to feel himself dancing with Rosemary. Or rather to feel himself stumbling clumsily after her as she led him with movements light as an angel. The lurching of the car had dazed his brain. Perhaps this year, dancing with her, he would get that strange feeling he got that time when he crashed down on the tiny drip Hunter in the rugger match and somehow just hadn't wanted to get up again, or let go of him, though the whistle was blowing furiously.

Peter jerked suddenly upright in the car with his face on fire and his hands shaking. The shock of the idea raised a lump in his throat like a mole-hill thrown up in an instant of time. There did seem to be something alive and scratching there too. He was in love with Rosemary. It would be dirty to think of hugging her, whilst a kiss . . .

He wanted to go to the lavatory, and laid his hand on his mother's arm. She was wrestling with the steering-wheel like Tarzan with the Wolf Girl and didn't notice. He forgot all about the lavatory, and instead decided that if there would be any time in his whole life when he could convert a try from the twenty-five yard line it was this very second. Of course it would be with the Baby Game rugger ball, not one of the full size ones.

He was beginning to hear the music of the first Paul Jones in his head now. He knew it would leave him facing Rosemary, but that he would immediately seize one of the forty fat ugly girls who stood each side of her. Probably he would start to sulk in the middle of the dance and have to pretend to be very interested in the pattern of the wallpaper. Perhaps they would think he was an artist. The whole thing might be bearable if her mother didn't sit there all the time on the sofa like a queen with silver hair. She watched him too. And her

father could be just like his and say things like, 'Your playing fields flood last term? My youngest lad's did, you know. Now do pull yourself together and dance with the girls. Come along! Want a spot of whisky? Ho! Ho! Ho!'

Peter found that he was out of the car with unfamiliar gravel under his feet. His mother wasn't kissing him. There was light in a great glass house; shadows moving with music and laughter. Now a brighter rectangle of light appeared in the centre of the confusion and he was stumbling towards the open door.

Rosemary's mother was holding out her long hand like the branch of a willow tree over the river. Her hair couldn't really be thunder-sky blue. Peter took the drooping hand, and looked at her just long enough to be polite, and to see if she was really like she always seemed to be in his dream. She said something, and then somehow *willed* him in to the dance room.

Music and movement was all round him, bumping against the walls. He was snatched in to a revolving chain of boys; not, though, before he had had time to notice that they all had real dinner jackets.

The music stopped. In the inner circle of girls Rosemary was facing him exactly. She smiled. So he did. Then he shifted his feet and looked at the floor. Now he was doing it; taking one of the fat ugly girls on her left. He thought he saw Rosemary lift her chin in a funny way. But he knew she must like one of the boys on his either side better than him. He couldn't just *take* her like that straight away.

'How old are you?' the fat girl asked. 'Thirteen,' said Peter.

'You must be one of Rosemary's friends not Jane's then.' The girl was looking at his suit now. 'I have a little sister who crashes *my* parties and asks kids of *her* own age,' she added.

'How old are you?' Peter asked stiffly.

The fat girl stared at him; pulling him around the floor as if he were a sack of something. 'You don't ask a girl things like that.'

Peter was exasperated. 'Well how do you know how old they *are*?'

'That is just the point,' the girl said carefully. 'It isn't intended that the *male* should know.'

Then she let go of Peter promptly, though the music hadn't stopped.

The music began again, and he was dragged into the revolving circle of 'males' inside which the smaller circle of girls was spinning in the opposite direction.

This time Rosemary was nowhere to be seen and an ugly thin girl grabbed him with more haste than was really polite. Peter determined to get in first.

'Where do you go to school?' he asked, pretending to be interested and sort

of intense the way his mother was at her dotty parties.

The ugly thin girl told him. 'Why's it called a *ladies'* college?' he said. This time he actually was intrigued. 'Are you very—are you grown up, I mean. At Cheltenham university?'

The girl just giggled and pressed him nearer to her breasts. Peter swallowed twice very quickly. Then the music stopped again and he began to think there was something unsatisfactory about a succession of brief relationships that were imposed and dissolved wholly at the discretion of a loud gramophone record.

He caught a glimpse of Rosemary and at once fell into a trance. It occurred to him that now he had seen her the vision might be made to last another year, and so there was no reason why he should stay at the dance any longer. He recognized that the greater part of him always shied at reality. He was happier with the dream. When he saw the *Cutty Sark* at Greenwich he spent far longer looking at the postcard he'd bought of the ship. After the business in the rugger match, he lay on his stomach with his hands cupped round his neck just thinking, when he knew that other boys would have picked a fight with Hunter to get the feeling again, and that it was what he should be doing.

Lying quite still on the school bed with his eyes shut his whole body wanted to sneeze. After a time, when it wouldn't, he'd got bored. He ate a whole box of liquorice allsorts and then turned back to the wonder of Bilbo Baggins, though he did once pause to take comfort from the lightness with which the *Höbbit* wore the curse of his having hair on his feet.

Peter found himself clapping; making slow, neat pops with his hands whilst he beamed in the appreciative way one did at the ugly thin girl. The clapping was somehow important, and an art. One seemed to be clapping something many miles away, without expectation of notice, and with an almost deliberate disinterest, while one looked dazed with pleasure. He decided the clapping was unreal because no one could know certainly what it was for.

The gramophone scraped for a second and then burst into the circular tune again. Peter smiled at the girl with a terrible parody of tragic parting. As he allowed himself to be welded into the chain of boys, he was suddenly struck by the dishonesty of the processes his mother called 'being sociable'. Really he was very nasty. But he knew he wouldn't change and that as the party continued he'd reach the height of precocious sophistication. He was a fraud.

The boy on his left jerked his arm violently in time with the music; determined on making the circle revolve faster. He had hair on his chin and one of those silk bands round his stomach. Peter thrust his own jaw out in distaste

and made a dry line with his mouth.

It was the ugly thin girl again. 'You're Peter Morton,' she said like the Spanish Inquisition in the Senior History broadcast.

Peter nodded, so as not to be seen talking to her since Rosemary was floating past gazing dreamily over the shoulder of a red-haired boy. It was silent sympathy.

'Were you at the Foresters?,' the ugly thin girl asked.

'No,' said Peter. It was safe now.

The girl seemed to like squashing him against her breasts like a baby.

'It wasn't much good,' she said quickly.

Peter wondered what it was. If someone kicked you and said 'sorry' you said, 'It's quite all right.' He was never able to say that without wondering immediately afterwards what the 'it' was. Was it the part kicked, or some impersonal self within him on whose behalf he was giving assurances? Either way 'it' seemed wrong.

'I suppose this is a quickstep?' he said earnestly, though having no possibility of knowing.

The girl pretended to listen. 'I think so. Yes, yes it is.'

Peter nodded wisely. Of course it made no difference to his basic step. One more second must surely reveal the fact to the girl.

'I say, look; let's stop—shall we?' he said with a sudden burst of confidence. He could feel the punctuation of his words in his mouth, and decided they were adult. He smiled naturally, then modified his lips to show he was in command.

'Thought I saw some drinks over there. Probably only squash, though—' He finished the sentence by raising his eyebrows.

'Yes, lovely!' the ugly thin girl said, bouncing on her toes with a thrilled movement. 'All right!'

Peter led her imperiously through the dancers; stopping with exaggerated deference, and his arm out like a point policeman, to let Rosemary sweep by. The ugly girl's words still rang in his ears, sounding the last retreat to his shyness.

He clinked his lemon squash against hers. It was in wine glasses, and he felt his spirits rising to the pitch that was intolerable in his father. He dropped his hand into his pocket and stared into the girl's eyes with a puzzled frown.

'What on earth is this!' he muttered slowly. She was gazing at him with a sort of empty wondering look like a puppy waiting to be fed, so he deliberately fumbled in his pocket for some moments before pulling out the bullet.

'Good Lord!' he said reverently.

'Whatever is it?' The ugly thin girl was excited.

'A bullet,' Peter said. 'My father's a stuffy colonel you know.'

The girl gasped. 'Was it fired at him?'

'Oh, dear me no,' Peter said, capturing the adult cadence quite naturally now. 'If it had been fired the bullet part would be separate from this brass cartridge part.'

'It's—*alive*?' The ugly thin girl found the right word proudly.

'Oh yes,' Peter said. He began tossing it absently from hand to hand like a cricket ball.

'What's that grey bullet part made of?'

'Lead—Or and alloy,' Peter corrected himself. He went on quickly in case she should ask what an alloy was. 'Of course it's a Russian bullet so it can't be fired from an English gun. Do you want another drink?'

The ugly thin girl shook her head, still gazing at the bullet. With his confidence at its height Peter dropped the bullet back into his pocket and looked deliberately round the walls at the oil portraits of Rosemary, her two older sisters, and her two little brothers. He had started to speak before he realized that his confidence wasn't so firm as to stop his voice quavering, and it sounded a bit too casual. 'Which of the pictures of the Jennings children do you like best?' he asked, knowing even as he spoke that the word 'children' was there to make the whole question what was called 'academic'.

'They're awfully nice, aren't they,' the ugly thin girl said; then appealed to him. 'Which do you like?'

'Rose—' Peter started to say; but the mole was throwing up a mountain in his throat, and the heat of the room had done something to his ears. 'Robin, I think,' he said.

The word hung there before him; quite dud, like a cricket ball that had bounced off his gloves. For a second it was his failure made visible; then suddenly he was angry.

'God, it's ruddy hot in here,' he hissed, affecting to cast a wary glance at her mother to emphasize the outrageousness of the remark. The ladies' college girl looked frightened, which was good.

'It is a bit,' she said, and at that moment a boy with spots came up and lugged her away like a country milk-can.

Peter was left leaning on his hands against the wall behind him. He rather wished they would leave sweaty marks on the wallpaper, but remembered he was in love with Rosemary. He began to sulk. The music raged around him

like an enemy whose intention of martyring Morton only bored and revolted him. But why was he afraid of speaking her name? Intuitively he knew it was something to do with magic. There had been the time at school when secretly he had boasted to his best friend that he was in love. 'What's her name?' Wrigley had asked. But though they were eighty miles away from Rosemary at school, and Wrigley lived two hundred miles away from her, Peter had been quite unable to tell him.

Now he was sulking like a Baby Game drip with a size six cricket bat and shoes instead of proper canvas boots. He was *doing* nothing. Yet, for almost as long as he could remember, Rosemary had been in his mind like a strange, warm and opaque disc of colour. Or rather her picture had always been near to his mind, because like the patch of sunshine reflected from a mirror it danced and played across his vision but was too elusive for him to seize and hold still. Then sometimes the dancing patch would play steadily upon his imagination, almost blinding him with its beauty. Always it did so at the most unexpected times; when he was struggling with his tie before chapel, or squaring up to a rising ball. Then he would make an exquisite knot and feel warm and no longer alone, or else try for a six and get clean bowled.

With his eyes hypnotized by the electric-blue gleam reflected off the silver buckles of his shoes, Peter began to sense that her mother must be looking at him. 'John dear,' she'd be whispering, 'do go and do something about the Morton boy. Rosemary was right; we should never have asked him at all.' Peter scowled. Surrendering himself to the blue fire consuming his shoes, he prayed it might burn him up like an atom bomb.

Peter looked up, and sure enough her mother, who was sitting on the sofa in the corner of the room, was beckoning to him. He started towards her, staying close to the wall and being bumped by the spinning dancers. She was going to be motherly. The ultimate humiliation. As he approached his depression deepened. Yet all Rosemary's family were strange and fascinating, and her mother particularly because of his dream, so he recognized in his depression only the degree of his removal from the dance, and all present reality.

'Hallo,' he said, finding some withered crinkle of the smile Rosemary's mother deserved.

Mrs Jennings patted the cushion beside her and said, 'Peter!' as if they'd just met at the North Pole.

Peter sat; remembering to hitch up the unfamiliar long trousers.

'Do tell me how you are getting on at school. Rosemary was so glad you could come,' Mrs Jennings said.

Peter wondered what he should reply to first, and decided only the first remark was a real question.

'Oh, tolerably, don't you know,' he said. 'Sort of not *bad*, I mean.' It was a desperate breakdown of his adult phrasing and he felt it sorely. Instantly on the offensive, he threw himself blindly at the impossible peaks of adult accomplishment. 'Rosemary looks very lovely tonight,' he said simply.

'Why, Peter! How *charming*.' Mrs Jennings's voice seemed to be shrieking all round him as if he were shut in the Parrot House at Regent's Park. She began to sway from side to side on the sofa, gripping the cushions with her hands, and looking this way and that for someone to tell how charming he was, as if anxious to hand out hot chestnuts before they got cold.

Peter flushed scarlet; but his embarrassment seemed only to lend him a new desperation. Inconsequently, the thought came to him that now he could convert that try from fifty yards, though still of course with the Baby Game ball. He got violently to his feet, smiling at Mrs Jennings, and at the same time became aware that the music had stopped and that Rosemary was standing all alone by the mantelpiece.

He crossed the room, slowing his step only when it occurred to him that his haste might be considered impolite.

Rosemary was turning towards him. She was really there: in soft colours, and with shining eyes, that were more extraordinary, and more strange, even than when the dancing phantom of her that lived with him stood still for a second in his mind. Peter smiled almost ruefully, and as the music started, took hold of her carefully like a figure of glass. 'I still can't really do it properly,' he said, beginning to follow her movements.

'You're much better, Peter!' Rosemary was shocked. 'I remembered you only liked doing waltzes, and now you've asked me for the very first one.'

'Yes. That's it,' Peter said quickly. He felt vaguely that angels had leapt to Morton's aid. Then he remembered the Paul Jones and knew it. 'Those Paul Joneses are very muddled always aren't they,' he added, settling the question beyond doubt.

Rosemary said nothing, but just smiled right into him. Dreaming, she gazed away again. She could do that. Talk a bit, then dream; look happy all the time, yet with a tragic sort of sadness Peter knew. And always she was *natural*. That was it. She would *drift* through everything as she drifted about in his mind. Peter swallowed. The mole was at work.

'Would you like to stop?' he asked. 'I'm afraid I'm not good. Would you like a drink?' It wasn't like giving the ugly thin girl orders, and the adult

punctuation just didn't matter. 'I mean I know they're your drinks,' he stumbled on, 'but as I'm with you I can offer you one. And that's all right— isn't it?'

In his anxiety he found he was violently throwing his head from side to side as he spoke. Slipping strangely towards the ceiling, so that he was coldly watching the idiot Morton, he wondered why he had to talk to her gently as if she were a baby; and whether perhaps he were not really a drip. When he spoke to her his every gesture expressed his awe, until it became a gross and pathetic parody of attention. From the ceiling the other Morton said, 'Yes, Pathetic!' with a very nasty sneer indeed.

'I'd love one, Peter,' Rosemary said.

Leading Rosemary dazed but triumphantly through the dancers Peter wondered about the occasions when he was called by his Christian name. There were his family who didn't count, and there was his headmaster who called Morton Peter with an injured look in his eyes after giving him six whacks with the cricket bat. This new category was quite strange though.

Peter stared at Rosemary sipping her drink, trying to make sense of this unreal person doing this physical thing, and trying to make the picture stick in his mind so that he would remember it forever. 'Didn't I see you near here on a bicycle just before Christmas?' Rosemary asked.

Peter felt he was turning into a snowman as he remembered the dream. 'I don't think so,' he said. 'I don't think it can have been me.'

Rosemary nodded; beginning to look far away again.

'How's your dog?' Peter said. The question was to tell her that he knew and cared a lot about her dog.

'Oh, Shem was run over!' Rosemary smiled, but was looking at something many miles away. 'It was terribly sad, because we'd had him for so long you see.'

Peter felt the adult phrases in his mouth. They were as silly as his mother's hats. He bit deeply into his lip, and taking a gulp of his orange squash without knowing why, tasted the blood. 'I see,' he said. 'I do see.'

Peter drank his orange slowly, following Rosemary sip for sip, not daring now to break the respectful sequence. He said nothing because there was nothing to say, and because she was with him.

He became aware that the music had stopped, and that people were popping their hands together in that polite way, and were drifting about in looser movements that were not governed by the thudding dance band. But they had

no part in the world where he stood with Rosemary.

A figure was moving towards them. Peter saw that it was the youth with the blue bruised chin and the silk cummerbund. He was all teeth and bow-tie, and Peter stiffened instinctively.

The youth turned his back on Peter; sweeping a low bow before Rosemary. 'Miss Rosemary Jennings!' he said. 'Might I conceivably have the pleasure of this dance?'

Without a word to Peter, Rosemary was gone. She was still smiling.

Peter felt his nails cutting into his palms. The mole in his throat must choke him. He looked towards the french-window and knew there must be room behind its heavy curtain, against the cold misted glass; away from them all. It was the other side of her mother though. He looked at his watch, but knew that two hours was too long to hide in the lavatory. They might think he had fainted and break the door down with an axe.

He walked out of the drawing-room door, keeping his step very casual. There was nothing in the hall except the row of dead coats on pegs, and smells and noises coming from the kitchen. He exulted because now the music was muffled behind him, but then he panicked thinking they might have locked the front door to stop people running away.

They hadn't. He closed it softly behind him; and then he was running with the sharp Christmas darkness cutting his eyes, and the tears turning to an icy hardness on his cheeks like streaks of balsa cement.

After a long time he slowed down. His chest was red hot. He began to think about buses and money, but he had nothing except the bullet in his pocket. He realized he was lost. He was in a strange lane with telegraph poles threatening to topple down on him like cabers in the Highland Games, and crouching bushes whispering, 'Morton! Morton! Morton!'

Steadily he began to follow the lane, not caring where it led him. Even if he got home he would be awake for hours with the music still in his ears, and Rosemary still in his eyes. Then, when he did fall asleep, he knew he would have the dream again.

He would be coming down the hill behind their house on his bicycle, and have to lift his bicycle over the stile that really wasn't there. As he struggled her mother would come out of the front door and just stand looking at him. She would be beautiful, shining like an angel, and he would feel terribly ashamed.

Then he would wake up crying like that drip Hunter when he had one of his nightmares.

The Golden Bowl

and the reassessment of innocence

In 1835 Tocqueville, discussing America and Russia, made the following remarkable prediction: 'Their starting-point is different and their courses are not the same; yet each of them seems marked out by the will of Heaven to sway the destinies of half the globe.' It is impossible to furnish exact dates but by the end of the nineteenth century the western frontier was closed and the drift of American power and attention was back toward the old-world. It started with reverent pilgrimages, but as their power and responsibility have grown it has provided such massive plans for support and salvation as Marshall Aid. The fate and behaviour of the American—specifically the rich, innocent American—in Europe, provided Henry James with his most fruitful theme, and in most of his international novels the innocent American either succumbs to or flees from experienced Europe. So much is commonplace. But in his last complete novel it seems to me that he disclosed equivocal qualities in that very innocence which hitherto he had tended to exploit mainly for its romantic potential (as with Milly Theale, for instance). I am suggesting that *The Golden Bowl* contains definite hints of what we might call a reassessment of innocence, a subtle examination of the ambiguous effects of the dangerous power of the American in Europe—dangerous because of the unique combination of innocence and wealth which constituted that power. Adam and Maggie Verver 'sway the destinies' of the Prince and Charlotte in a way that justifies Tocqueville's prognostication, and in a way which I think indicates that James had come to realize that American innocence was now eligible for reappraisal. Innocence victimized is stock melodrama—but innocence triumphant was a new, challenging and perhaps disturbing theme. A theme which was apter for this century than perhaps he ever fully realized. I believe that a re-examination of the innocence of Adam and Maggie will bring this out.

There is plenty about Adam (starting with the name) that suggests the traditional innocence. He is 'the best man' the Prince has ever seen: he is 'natural' and has 'no form'. Yet there are equivocations from the start. The Prince says to Maggie: 'I'm like a chicken, at best, chopped up and smothered in sauce . . . your father's the natural fowl running about the basse-cour.' The Prince is slaughtered and served up from the start, while Adam seems to

possess a crude, if hidden, energy. He likes 'large spaces' and even in the thick of society somehow he and Maggie still 'moved slowly through large, still spaces'—this recalls the Whitman Adamic figure 'detached in measureless oceans of space'. To Mrs Assingham, a voyeur busy-body, Adam is like 'a sick baby', while even Maggie often thinks of him as 'her child', even, once, comparing him to her doll. All the characters emphasize his retained youth: it is he who is 'really young' while Charlotte is 'really old', in fact he is 'always, marvellously, young'. Reiteration makes it an almost mystical quality. In one of his meditations the Prince thinks of Adam as 'a little boy', 'an infant king'—but, we say to ourselves, kings are higher than princes: it is a warning note. Again, he is 'a revelation of simplicity' and because of this the 'marvellous enamel' of his 'firm outer shell' must be preserved. Enamel suggests polish and purity—but also coldness and hardness. Similarly he always wears a 'flawless white waistcoat' and yet the whiteness seems not only vulnerable amid 'the many-coloured human appeal' of society, it comes to seem almost bloodless, ominous—inhuman. His innocence, Mrs Assingham decides, 'will pull them through'. It is worth adding that it also pulls Charlotte back to an America she detests—pulls her by the neck. To preserve his innocence he is 'exquisitely humbugged' and Charlotte considers him 'blind'. Yet constant reference is made to his eyes. They have 'the outlook of a pair of ample and uncurtained windows' and they seem to admit 'the morning and evening in unusual qualities': they 'wander without fear' and are 'unblinking'. This might be the disconcerting stare of the blind—but often one has the feeling that he can see everything, in the light or in the dark. And those unblinking eyes are terrifying. He says little but 'stares hard' at other people talking: and in one of James's rare excursions into his mind we find him meditating on his visual rights. 'His freedom to see . . . what could it do but steadily grow and grow.' His speech, which consists mainly of pauses and repetitions of what Maggie says, may be the result of dumb simplicity, or it may be full of sinister laconic irony. What is audible—at least to Maggie—is his 'perpetual hum of contemplation'. Pylons look inert and passive, but when you put your ear to them you hear that faint hum of enormous concealed power. Rather frightening. And so is Adam. The reference to power is not irrelevant. Adam realizes that 'as he had money, he had force' and everyone needs his 'power'. Financially all the main characters depend on him: as Maggie says, 'Everything that touches you, everything that surrounds you, goes on—by your splendid indifference and your incredible permission—at your expense.' The irony is clear—he both pays and is taken advantage of: but in a subtler way we come

to feel him as the unmoved mover of all things in the novel. His strength is emphasized as much as his inaction.

The images that halo around Maggie are more dense and complicated: it is as though James attaches to her everything he wants to say about the innocent American girl. She is ignorant, the Prince says that she knows nothing about him: Mrs Assingham notes her 'incapacity to doubt' and stresses that 'she wasn't born to know evil'—a fact which Maggie seems to corroborate by saying 'I've never had the least blow' and exclaiming at one point 'I don't want to know,' the knowledge in question being at once specific and general. The question, as the Assinghams discuss it, is whether this ignorance is a 'danger' or 'an element of positive safety'. She is also described as blind and passive. Her imagination is 'sealed', her senses closed to the 'fact of evil'. She 'lets things go', 'makes too easy terms for one', is not 'selfish enough'. Significantly, on one occasion 'she was passed about . . . like a dressed doll'. Like all innocents she seems not to be a part of society, 'though whether through being above it or below it, too much outside it or too much lost in it, too unequipped or too indisposed', the Prince cannot decide. The stance is maintained. She is a detached spectator of the important card game near the end of the novel, because 'cards were as nought to her' and she is always 'out of the party'. But the card game in James becomes an important image of society itself—the game of social living which has strict rules of relationships and secrecies and permits only limited darings: thus we feel Maggie to be hovering, always, just out of the social game. This expands to Mrs Assingham's opinion that she is 'outside of ugly things'. Even at the end she still feels herself to be standing outside 'the glass' of the Prince and Charlotte's relationship. For this reason she still retains her essential innocence even when possessed of knowledge of evil: the knowledge doesn't seep down into her, doesn't even stain her. James clinches the 'pre-social' nature of Maggie by a daring image. She has to improvise like 'a settler or trader in a new country'.

But James also surrounds Maggie with religious associations. 'The Blessed Virgin and all the Saints have her in their keeping,' asserts the Prince, and when we hear of the silver cross she wears out of sight next to her skin, we feel it has carismatic protective power. There is one description of Maggie with her son which certainly invites an association with Renaissance pictures of the Virgin and child, and when Mrs Assingham goes to visit Maggie on the occasion of her discovery of the golden bowl she strikes her 'like some holy image in a procession' and an explicit comparison is made—she has become 'the miraculous madonna'. It is further suggested that she is a sacrificial

victim. As she sees Charlotte approach her for the climactic interview which is to settle all their fates, she realizes that she will have to 'pay' for all of them; carry, that is, the sins of the social world on her shoulders. And when she looks yearningly at Adam for some support in her hour of greatest need, only to find that he is not looking at her and will not help her, it would seem that James intends a faint echo of the crucified Christ abandoned by his Father. At one point the imagery touches on a level of violence which would seem disproportionate to the actual scene: as Charlotte approaches for that crucial interview, Maggie feels 'her head was already on the block' and she is only not sure 'whether or no the axe had fallen'. It is worth recalling that in his notebook James commented on Milly Theale in the following way: 'She is like a creature dragged shrieking to the guillotine—to the shambles.' But Milly died, as all good sacrificial victims should. Maggie lives, very actively, on. She has other qualities which are important for the working out of the situation of the novel: an 'intensity of conscience' and 'a passion for order and symmetry'. It is this passion for order which prompts her to pick up the shattered fragments of the golden bowl in what is perhaps the most symbolic gesture of the book, for the crack in the bowl is the fault which runs through all their relationships and when the truth is out—when, that is, the bowl lies shattered on the floor—then there is nothing to hold the fractured pieces together 'but Maggie's hands': it is she who will hold them all together, who is responsible for maintaining 'the sacred equilibrium' of society which James revered so much. Divine saviour, slaughtered innocent, resourceful settler—it is an amazing range of imagery for the girl who is described as 'very, very simple' by the sophisticated Prince.

But unlike Adam, Maggie does collide with knowledge, has to assimilate it and act upon it. (Though, as I suggested, the assimilation is curiously cerebral.) Her epistemological adventure has the effect of jogging and nudging the images of her sacred pre-social innocence, though none of them are finally overturned or cancelled out. Her blind passivity, for instance, conceals a strenuous 'intensity of observance'. Right at the start the Prince says 'You see too much,' though, typically, he adds, 'when you don't see too little.' There are references to her straining her eyes: when, for instance, she questions Mrs Assingham about the pre-marital relationship of the Prince and Charlotte, her eyes 'all the time pressed and strained'. By the end it is her very lucidity of vision, 'her clearness', which seems to save them all: the blind doll becomes the omniscient puppet-master. Her motive—a central one in all James—is 'her deeper need to know where she "really" was', 'where she was going'. Her

position is exactly that of the innocent Laura Wing in *A London Life* who peers through the dim light of the Opera House trying to distinguish the truth of her sister's dubious behaviour in the opposite box: and characters as different as Maisie and Strether continually strain their eyes in an effort to read the clues correctly, to make the correct inferences from ambiguous data, to orient themselves in strange social territories. What Maggie also discovers is that knowledge is 'a fascination as well as a fear' so that she feels some genuine excitement as well as a sense of duty in taking up the position of 'sentry'—on guard for all of them. And just as the Prince and Charlotte seem to fade gradually from an active into a passive rôle—so Maggie, deciding that she has been hitherto too passive, becomes by the end of the book the most active character. But knowledge in her case also leads to a need to abandon her old naturalness and practise careful deception on Adam—the 'diabolical deception' for 'sacred ends'. In fact she 'practises' on all of them—the deceived becomes the deceiver. Yet James makes this seem at times an heroic duplicity—which is why the Madonna images never quite fade from our minds. She steps up to the footlights on the stage of society and becomes a virtuoso performer (there are many circus images in the book and at one point Maggie has become 'a bare-back rider'; significantly, Adams has no 'affinity with the footlights'). And the performance is sanctified because it prevents a disruption of established social relationships. It is the enamel of society as well as Adam's enamel that must be preserved. To fulfil her divine mission Maggie has to enter 'the labyrinth' or descend into 'the well', 'the mine'—all three images occur. But although she seems, like all Jamesian innocents, utterly helpless in her first tentative fumbings through the novel darkness, she finally emerges leading the Minotaur by the nose. The 'holy calm' of the social surface is not ruffled but underneath a complete shift of positions has been enacted. At the end Maggie knows more than anyone. Maggie is in charge. It is the Prince and Charlotte who are left in the labyrinth: Charlotte is 'off in some darkness of space' and the Prince, although he seems to occupy his old position at Maggie's side, is really in a 'grey medium in which he helplessly groped'. They seem to regress from experience to innocence (Mrs Assingham calls them 'innocent victims of fate'), to fall from light back into darkness. Maggie's progress is in the reverse direction. One might almost use the image of intersecting cones.

Hints of the Americans' increasing control crescendo throughout the book. Early on, Charlotte explains to Mrs Assingham that she and the Prince are 'placed' by the preference of Maggie and Adam for each other's company. She seems to mean, rather cynically, that they are thus 'thrown together':

but by the end of the book they will be placed in a rather different way, placed exactly where the others want them. And placed for good. Even when they seem to be most free to arrange their illicit relationship they are, as the Prince vaguely realizes, all 'in Mr Verver's boat'. And it is not they who hold the tiller. Charlotte might at first seem to be a subtle schemer who steers Adam towards marriage—but in the Prince's view Adam and Maggie had deliberately 'brought her on . . . to do the worldly for them'. She is more the hired actress than the shrewd opportunist. In Mrs Assingham's opinion it is Maggie and Adam who 'impose their forms' on Charlotte and the Prince. One is even allowed to feel that the latter couple were driven to adultery by forces beyond their own volition. And once Maggie discovers their guilty secret her sense of control becomes more conscious and explicit. She suddenly realizes that 'she might still live to drive (them all) about like a flock of sheep'—the sacrificial lamb is also the dominating shepherd—and we feel the stiffening of purpose in her. 'There was no limit to her conceived design of not letting them escape.' There is even a note of something like glee in her conviction that 'they're paralysed, they're paralysed'. 'I make them do what I like' she all but boasts to Mrs Assingham and it is that lady who decides that 'it will be Maggie herself who will mete out' all the punishments.

Her 'sense of possession' becomes a 'perpetual throb' and even at the height of her 'blameless egoism' (which is described as 'magnificent') she is 'as a little pointed diamond'. 'The Princess showed something of the glitter of consciously possessing the constructive, creative hand'—both the hardness, the inexorable cutting edge, and the sharp brilliance of the diamond are hinted. And by the end Maggie seems, indeed, to be running the whole show—putting on the play. The pathetically inept performer grows into the relentless author. At the time of that crucial card game she is thrilled 'with the idea of the prodigious effect she had at her command' and as she looks at the empty room where she is to have the decisive talk with Charlotte she sees it as 'a stage awaiting a drama' and she gains strength from the thought of 'all the possibilities she controlled'. Maggie's 'revenge'—the word is, tellingly, used only once—is not a matter of a sharp knife and a dark alley: it lies in her 'compassionate patronage'. Her revenge is in saving them—on her own terms. What has happened, as she sees it, is that the Prince and Charlotte have 'lost the key' to their values while she—it is her own word—'bristles' with values of her own. The Prince follows her tacit instructions 'as he might have received a bunch of keys or a list of commissions' and there is something barbed (if not barbarous) about her silent domination of the closing scenes. The difference

between Maggie and the first innocent American that James sent to Europe is clearly stated. As Maggie watches the famous card game she realizes that the way 'usually open to innocence outraged . . . would have been to give them up'. But in her case 'giving them up was, marvellously, not to be thought of'. When Christopher Newman came face to face with the mischief of decadent Europe he simply shrugged his American shoulders, rattled the American money in his pockets, and gave them all up. Maggie, marvellously, won't. But whether we should marvel at her divine heroism or the hard brilliance of her art is left equivocal. The results of the combined art of Maggie and Adam (both are spoken of as weaving spells) are clear. Adam, inscrutable hands in inscrutable pockets, leads Charlotte away by 'a long silken halter looper around her beautiful neck'. The halter is invisible, of course, but we see it. And to see it is surely to see its cruelty. (On one occasion when Maggie hears the trapped Charlotte taking some people round Adam's gallery she fancies that Charlotte's high voice sounds 'like the shriek of a soul in pain'.) The Prince, on the other hand, becomes 'as fixed in his place as some statue', a statue which Maggie superintends. Interestingly enough, at the start of the book Maggie had seemed like a statue to her father—once again there is a reversal of rôles. The innocents step down off their pedestals and put their plans into action: the result is to turn the two experienced Europeans into museum pieces. Right at the end, before the two couples separate, Maggie and Adam stand back and watch the Prince and Charlotte having tea in one of their sumptuously furnished rooms. To their eyes the unfortunate couple look like 'the kind of human furniture required, aesthetically, by the scene'. 'To a lingering view,' James adds, 'they might have figured as concrete attestations of a rare power of purchase,' and Adam's last cryptic comment is surely clinchingly sinister. 'Le compte y est. You've got some good things.' Whatever else happens in this dense novel, one major theme must be that Maggie and Adam turn Charlotte and the Prince into 'human furniture', into 'things'. They may, as the book also suggests, have 'saved' them, but only by automatizing them. It may be an aesthetic redemption to be turned into a work of art, but it is also a dehumanization, a death.

In his preface to *The American*, James wrote: 'Great and gilded the whole trap set, in fine, for his wary freshness, and into which it would blunder upon its fate.' James's novels are continually engaged in following 'the wary freshness' of innocence into 'the gilded trap' of complex society. In *The Golden Bowl* society still contains 'bristling traps' though, like most of the traps in James's world, they are 'all smothered in flowers' (we may recall that Eve succumbed

to an 'ambush hid among sweet Flours'); the departure from the old theme lies in the persons finally trapped. At one point indeed we are told of Maggie flapping her wings and desiring flight from her 'gilded cage', but it is stated as a past condition. At the end it is Charlotte who is 'a prisoner looking through bars', 'richly gilt bars' as Maggie sees it. And she sees it by walking to freedom round 'the cage'. True, Charlotte does break out of her cage for one last attempt to gain her freedom (the crucial talk with Maggie), but she is baffled and returns to imprisonment. And there she will remain, we gather, 'for ever and ever'. The Prince is also seen by Maggie as being in 'prison' and 'caged', and once again it is with a 'thrill' that she notes how he is 'straitened and tied' by her superior manipulation of the situation. Admittedly Maggie visits and comforts him in prison—the image is sustained—but then, as we learned, her revenge was a subtle thing: it was to consist of 'compassionate patronage'.

To anyone who might emphasize the fact that James does imply that Adam is a sacrificial lamb and Maggie a scapegoat, I would point out the shrewd insight of the worldly Mrs Assingham: 'There's no imagination so lively, once it's started, as that of really agitated lambs. Lions are nothing to them, for lions are sophisticated, are blasés, are brought up from the first, to prowling and mauling.' An incontrovertible point of the book is that at least one of the lambs does get agitated, turns into 'a timid tigress', and finds herself to be more than a match for the blasés lions of an older society: the lions are rounded up, charmed to a stillness, and deprived of their teeth. The lambs, the innocents, the American are triumphant where they had hitherto always been more or less defeated.

Whatever James's full intentions in this novel were, he certainly detected the remorseless cruelty of the victory of innocence. How conscious that spirit of conquest is in Maggie and Adam, how aware *they* are of the equivocal results of their saving power and grace—this perhaps is left unsettled. But I think James saw it. Innocence invested with power and riches can become a sinister, even a dangerous, thing: dangerous not in spite of but because of that very innocence—thus formulated, the theme of the novel might seem to adumbrate the international position of America since the first world war. Its power and riches have at times saved Europe (intervention in World War II—Marshall Aid) but the very innocence with which that power has been used has at other times seemed culpable. The cult of innocence was strong in the nineteenth century—particularly in America. Our century has had to reconsider the assessment of innocence very carefully and I think that James, who in many ways contributed to the cult, in his last book has perceived that

innocence, no matter how benevolent and pure, may contain its own kind of sinister threat.

II

In 1907, three years after the first edition of *The Golden Bowl*, James published *The American Scene*, a book which contained his meditations on his homeland, revisited after years of aculturation in Europe. Not unexpectedly he felt alienated and dispossessed, he was shocked by the 'huge American rattle of gold' which only seemed to underline the spiritual impoverishment and bankruptcy of values he everywhere discerned. But more interesting in relation to my point about *The Golden Bowl* are those remarks which increase the equivocations lurking around Adam Verver's 'innocence'.

Here is the Prince discussing the moral sense with Mrs Assingham ('you others' refers to Adam and Maggie, the Americans as opposed to the continentals).

'... I should be interested,' she presently remarked, 'to see some sense you don't possess.'

Well, he produced one on the spot. 'The moral, dear Mrs Assingham. I mean, always, as you others consider it. I've of course something that in our poor, dear, backward Rome sufficiently passes for it. But it's no more like yours than the tortuous stone staircase—half-ruined into the bargain!—in some castle of our *quattrocento* is like the "lightning elevator" in one of Mr Verver's fifteen-storey buildings. Your moral sense works by steam—it sends you up like a rocket. Our is slow and steep and unlighted, with so many steps missing that—well, that it's as short, in almost any case, to turn round and come down again.'

The opposition of the elevator and the staircase was one to which James returned in *The American Scene*—and through these images he says most of what he wants to say about the differences between America and Europe. Saddened to see so many old buildings being torn down, to see valuable clusters of old associations disappearing into rubble, to be replaced by the harshly modern anonymous skyscraper which defined all attempts at veneration and historic respect, James imagined the new spirit of New York boasting in the following way. 'You may have a feeling for keeping on with an old staircase, consecrated by the tread of generations—especially when it's "good", and old staircases are often so lovely, but how can you have a feeling for keeping on with an old elevator? ... You'd be ashamed to venerate the arrangement

in fifty floors, accordingly, if you could.' Later, having come to hate travelling in elevators, James drew out some of the implications of what he called 'the great religion of the elevator'.

'To wait, perpetually, in a human bunch, in order to be hustled, under military drill, the imperative order to "step lively", into some tight mechanic receptacle, fearfully and wonderfully working, is conceivable, no doubt as a sad liability of our nature, but represents surely, when cherished and sacrificed to, a strange perversion of sympathies and ideals. Anything that breaks the gregarious spell, that relieves one of one's share, however insignificant, of the abject collective consciousness of being pushed and pressed in, with something that one's shoulders and one's heels must dodge at their peril, something that slides or slams or bangs, operating, in your rear, as ruthlessly as the guillotine—anything that performs this office puts a price on the lonely sweetness of a step or two taken by one's self, of deviating into some sense of independent motive power, of climbing even some grass-grown staircase. . . .'

The elevator is more than a symbol of the ruthless, remorseless mechanical efficiency with which America treated its inhabitants: its brutal speed and violent directness also reveal the American predilection for the 'short-cut' in the creation of a society.

American society, like the American moral sense, was going up 'like a rocket'. Adam indeed is like a silent impresario-cum-speculator who was trained in 'the great religion of the elevator'—and to him the inhabitants of the half-ruined old staircases of old Europe, like the Prince, must cede the initiative and control. The elevator was 'an almost intolerable symbol of the herded and driven state' which characterized the American way of life: and 'herded and driven' is just about what Charlotte and the Prince are, by Adam and Maggie. Europe has been pushed into the American lift.

The skyscraper itself seemed to James to offer a sinister hint of the way America was going. 'The fatal "tall" pecuniary enterprise rises where it will, in the candid glee of new worlds to conquer'—and surely that last phrase is not inapplicable to Adam and Maggie, those 'stage pirates' who came to 'riffling the Golden Isles' and who 'wink at each other and say "Ha-ha!"'. Clearly James felt that while Europe was rich in 'embodied and consecrated forms', in America an irresistible pecuniary power 'beat its wings in the void'. The possibility that American money might try to fill the American void with the time-perfected forms and products of Europe came home to him when he visited the Metropolitan Museum.

'Acquisition—acquisition if need be on the highest terms—may, during

the years to come, bask here as in a climate it has never before enjoyed. There was money in the air, ever so much money—that was, grossly expressed, the sense of the whole intimation. And the money was to be all for the most exquisite things. . . . Here it is, no doubt, that one catches the charm of rigours that take place all in the aesthetic and the critical world. They would be invidious, would be cruel, if allied to personal interests, but they take on a high benignity as soon as the values concerned become values mainly for the mind. . . . The thought of the acres of canvas and the tons of marble to be turned out into the cold world as the penalty of old error and the warrant for a clean slate ought to have drawn tears from my eyes. . . . The Museum, in short, was going to be great, and in the geniality of the life to come such sacrifices, though resembling those of the funeral-pile of Sardanapalus, dwindled to nothing.' Adam Verver's museum was going to be 'great', was to be a triumph of 'acquisition on the highest terms': what James showed in his novel, and what seems to worry him suspiciously little here, is that such acquisition could indeed be 'cruel, if applied to personal interests', for Adam's museum really contains Charlotte and the Prince: they, distinctly, are two of its 'good things'. James, the ashamed American, wanted 'art' and 'forms' for his country on almost any terms: it was James the novelist who revealed the inhumanity latent in the acquisition.

III

Now that Tocqueville's prophecy has so emphatically come true and America has to set about subjecting the non-communist world to its influence quite consciously, we are getting terser, less subtle, but more immediately urgent reassessments of innocence. Graham Greene's *Quiet American*, for instance, ends up murdered not because of his intentions, which were good, but because of his innocence which made those intentions lethal among a people he could not understand. Greene's point is this: 'Innocence always calls mutely for protection, when we would be so much wiser to guard ourselves against it: innocence is like a dumb leper who has lost his bell, wandering the world meaning no harm.' The English journalist narrator who is experience-wise sums up the American idealist Pyle who was innocent-harmful. 'He'll always be innocent, you can't blame the innocent, they are always guiltless. All you can do is control them or eliminate them. Innocence is a kind of insanity.'

Lederer and Burdick managed to reach even President Eisenhower with their outraged exposure of American behaviour in Asia called *The Ugly*

American. There are two kinds of American in the book. The good ones—who try and understand and sympathize with the foreigners of Asia and who are pragmatic saviours with their technological know-how and tact: and the bad ones—who can be summed up by the cartoon of Ambassador Louis Sears which appeared, fictionally, in the Asiatic paper, the *Eastern Star*. 'The cartoon showed a short, fat American, his face perspiring, and his mouth open like a braying mule's, leading a thin, gracefully built Sarkhanese man by a tether round his neck towards a sign bearing two of the few Sarkhanese words the ambassador could recognize—"Coca-Cola".' (The tether provides an amusing echo of the one by which Adam led Charlotte off to her eternal dungeon.) James's theme has become a contemporary problem—the problem of innocent wealth having, in effect, to save and support a significant portion of the rest of the world, and at times showing itself to be dangerously unprepared for the task. But this was not quite the state of affairs in the first decade of this century. Then American wealth and influence were unchecked by any imposed responsibilities and the question was not so much of salvation as of spoliation. The old and pessimistic Mark Twain wrote this in 1906:

'For good or for evil we continue to educate Europe. . . . Something more than a century ago we gave Europe the first notions of liberty it had ever had and thereby largely and happily helped to bring on the French Revolution and claim a share in its beneficial results. We have taught Europe many lessons since. But for us, Europe might never have known the interviewer; but for us certain of the European States might never have experienced the blessing of extravagant imposts; but for us the European Food Trust might never have acquired the art of poisoning the world for cash; but for us her Insurance Trusts might never have found out the best way to work the widow and orphan for profit; but for us the long-delayed resumption of Yellow Journalism in Europe might have been postponed for generations to come. Steadily, continuously, persistently, we are Americanizing Europe, and all in good time we shall get the job perfected.'

That the power and influence of America over Europe was—and is—for good and evil is as subtly implied in *The Golden Bowl* as it is loudly asserted in *The Ugly American*. And if contemporary criticism of culpable American innocence seems now to be more urgent and astringent it is only because, to return to Tocqueville's prophecy, few people can have much doubt as to who, finally, for the good of civilization, must prevail.

The Birth of Pride

My first recollection of Lilac Park is the salt of tears. The sight of tear-stained cheeks made others call me a cry baby, which I couldn't help being so immediately after the severance of my umbilical cord.

Nonetheless, in a short space of time I was growing new roots. I roller-skated on the bare boards of the gymnasium. Hundreds of metal wheels had rubbed some of these boards into pale velvet; and where the pressure of these wheels had contradicted the grain, there were splinters which when we fell thrust themselves into our flesh. And I used to tear the wings off flies. The flies do not amuse me now; I can no longer understand how Apollo was able to tear Marsyas out of the scabbard of his limbs.

When a year of roller-skates and flies had gone, the salt of tears became the salt of the sea that flowed through my veins. A psychological revolution set me apart from my playmates. I stopped wishing to offend authority for the sake of offending it; this was a sure road to popularity, and I only used it where games, food and drill were concerned. Liked by very few, I became the receptacle of nearly universal contempt. I had a ferocious temper, and threatened a matron with my penknife. So when, in the Ladies' Annexe of the Guards' Club, Uncle John suggested I should learn ju-jitsu, my mother put up a vehement opposition.

If the tingling of the sea in my veins contained the germs of sensuality, that did not become apparent till later. My imagination was not then haunted by any extraordinary *mélange* of poetry and gratification, like angels sucking eggs of their sweetness. I had moments of ecstasy when my eyelids failed to droop, and the blood refused to drain out of my hands. There existed simply the birth of my pride, separating me from my fellow human beings—the 'her' and its concomitant instincts—if not from the powers that be on high.

Every Sunday, after church at Lilac Park, I went by myself for a walk through the grounds. I remember those walks best in a hot July. The large, Victorian school building, from which I started, was red brick, and suffered from its profusion of fussy window ledges, bogus chimneys, and ornamental balustrades. A hundred yards to one side of it was a grotesque clock tower which chimed the hours in tunes from which a note was invariably missing. On the other side stood a cedar of Lebanon whose branches were every year

weighed down and sometimes broken by the snow.

I began in the woods, where some boys were building huts, and playing Red Indians. Then I came into the park. Somebody was chasing a butterfly. If caught, it would suffocate in a jar of ammonia, and its frail velvet wings be pinned on to a board. Next I went down to the river. Other boys, hidden in the bracken round the sewers, were eating sweets. I ignored them, and talked to the urchins on the river beach. One of these urchins was sure he had seen my mother as an assistant at a butcher's shop in Ipswich.

But the great bell that could be heard throughout the park rang to summon us to luncheon. I climbed up the hill again, and through the copse where I had made mud castles. In the summer these castles had turned to dust. I was never sorry. My creative instincts unsatiated, I planned to build new castles, more ambitious than the old in so far as they were to be surrounded by a moat.

I washed my hands, and queued up to have them looked at by the matron I had threatened with the penknife. In connection with food, cleanliness at Lilac Park was much appreciated, although I seem to remember our eating a great deal of pork. We Gentiles were regardless of the fact Jehovah had forbidden pork to the Jews.

I was quite content to eat pork, particularly when in the Latin grace it had been stated how grateful we were to the Lord for His giving us what we had. But I hated the herrings which the East Anglian fishermen caught in the North Sea. Herrings made me stand on my chair and scream. This Sunday there was meat for luncheon which I couldn't bear to touch, because we had had herrings on Friday. The plates still smelt of them, and infected what would have been wholesome roast beef and Yorkshire pudding.

The matron said she couldn't care two 'hoots' whether I liked the meat or not: I had to eat it. In matters of school discipline the matron's 'hoots' were of some importance. 'It's a waste,' she said. 'Think of the starving refugees out in Israel.'

I ate it reluctantly, not because she sucked her teeth, but because Cohen sat next to me. His father bought and sold furniture, so I asked Cohen how he would bid. 'How do you start,' I asked, 'when each man bids a little higher than his neighbour?'

'It's easy,' he said. 'While you're both bidding low, you must suddenly bid high. Your opponent will be so taken aback he'll fall out. Whereas if you'd gone up and up in small stages, his blood would go up too, and you'd have to pass the figure which your opponent thought too high if whatever you're bidding for is to be yours.'

I was determined to apply this method to any sale I went to, so as to become a shrewd man of business. It would satisfy that vein of avarice in my temperament which has made me averse to pouring honey and incense on the waves.

I was in a form called Shell, which on Monday mornings had French lessons with Mr Mutton. While Mr Mutton, with his tales of shrapnel in the Boer War, and his enthusiasm for golf, was the friend of all the boys, Mr Rainbow (who, physically at least, looked like Marcel Proust) was despised by the whole school. I was his only friend. The difference lay in this: Rainbow was the aesthete, Mutton the Philistine.

Mutton had retired from business, and settled down in his villa at Felixstowe. He had an air of distinction, and of being the connoisseur of worldly affairs. His check tweeds were not too loud, but nearly so. His head was sweet with grease, and not a hair dared to venture out of place. Eau-de-Cologne scented the silk handkerchiefs on which he pretended to blow his nose.

We were meant to be reading a book called *Jours de Gloire*, about the bravery of the French Resistance movement in the last war. Men crawled through drain pipes and swam in cesspools. Women hid in cupboards. All manner of things took place, which we could never discover for ourselves because the French of *Jours de Gloire* was too difficult.

Mutton translated a little. Term after term he had to teach with the same book to the same form, and the amusement of it began to pall. Nor was this a shrapnel morning. A question about the state of the greens on the golf course provided an admirable red herring. This prompted him to explain his impunctuality; his wife insisted on putting all the clocks in the villa at Felixstowe ten minutes late. So the golfing programme on the television (when few people had one) also started late. And every morning he set off late in his Armstrong Siddeley.

Here Mutton lit one of his many cigarettes, puffed at it, and told us as a matter of confidence how his spotless Armstrong Siddeleys (they were in the plural) would never start, so that he arrived at school later than even he had intended, and therefore had no time to roll the greens.

It seemed we should never learn any French from *Jours de Gloire*. Golf condemned the activities of the Maquis to an oblivion I am sure they didn't really deserve.

My mother was anxious I should become a patriot not only in sentiment,

but in reality. She wanted me to be an officer in the Brigade of Guards, and so strong was her determination that it fermented in her sub-conscious. The result: our gardener, who loves flowers, had to plant row upon row of scarlet geraniums. Their dressing was so impeccable our lawn resembled the forecourt of Buckingham Palace.

As I never mastered the most elementary foot drill, and was never promoted to rifle exercises (done with a plain slab of wood), my mother became worried. She gave her child the choice: 'Either your learn to box, or you learn to dance.'

The only time I boxed had been over a question of honour. Although my opponent was smaller, he was master of the art, so the episode had ended in blood and tears. It had stung my pride to appear yet again in public with stain-smeared cheeks, and I chose dancing.

The ballroom walls at Lilac Park were Adam green. The curtains were walnut picked out in silver; the furniture, the convoluted pillars of the fireplace, and the dusk blue looking glasses a combination of Spanish Baroque and German Rococo. In such surroundings duly coated in gilt, I pushed the dancing mistress round the floor against the music of the waltz (although in self-defence I should say I soon learnt the steps, as opposed to the rhythm, of the dance which Byron thought so *risqué*). The fox-trot, however, not being so simple and triangular, was completely beyond me. So were the Scotch reels, in one of which like a mad sailor I clutched at air in an attempt to persuade the audience I was an agile rope climber.

When, recently, I tried to become a deb's delight, I was sorry for a certain piece of rudeness of which I had been guilty towards my dancing mistress. My partner had been snatched from me by another young man. I watched them doing the cha-cha-cha (five paces forwards, five paces backwards, and one to the side), and the same foursomes and eightsomes I had tried to learn at Lilac Park. With a skill I envied they glided over the parquetry floor. I hated their happiness.

And this unhappiness of mine was due to one incident. Infuriated by the dancing mistress at Lilac Park, who had been henpecking me on account of my failure to keep time with her in the waltz, I pressed my nose close to hers, as though to kiss, and said: 'Your breath smells disgusting.'

My dancing lessons were stopped; and at her next race meeting my mother backed a horse called 'Problem Child'. It won.

My ineptitude for any kind of physical exercise had widened my separa-

tion from the common herd. But as a sort of compensation I was allowed to look through the telescope whose copper dome, contrasting nicely with the round red brick tower upon which it seemed to sit like a green breast, was visible from practically every point during my walk round the park. It was the Sister who arranged this, and it was also she who used to comfort me when, during my religious crisis, visions of hell fire prevented me from going to sleep.

One night in the dormitory I explained to her my difficulty. In 1172 my ancestor, de Traci, had been one of the knights who slew Thomas à Becket on the altar steps. Because he had helped in this dastardly crime, the Pope cursed my family with the curse that the wind should always blow in their faces. This meant that in the days of square rigging the Tracys could never go on a Crusade. Although both square rigging and Crusades had long since been out of fashion, I imagined His Holiness still used to curse me once a year.

The illusion became a torment. Should I never be able to redeem myself in the eyes of God? The Sister said I could. She taught me a poem in which God, Truth and Beauty were the same thing. The stars we stared at pantheistically confirmed the beauty aspect. She was nagged at (without the penknife) until I was allowed to look through the telescope.

Through this telescope I saw the pale, paste-coloured craters of the moon, and its icy brittle mountains casting shadows the lens brought into a sharp focus. I looked at the gold ball of Venus, and read how this planet was enveloped in an atmosphere of carbon dioxide which blanketed what lay beneath in the humid heat of a greenhouse. The telescope also revealed the red spot on Jupiter, whose atmosphere, my book said, consisted of methane and ammonia. Methane poisoned Welshmen at the bottom of coal mines, and ammonia was the liquid gas, used on hot July afternoons at Lilac Park, to kill the butterflies incarcerated in their jars.

This, and more, I learnt from Sir James Jeans. His paradoxes puzzled yet fascinated me. How could the Universe be finite but boundless? Furthermore, Jeans said the Universe was expanding, but I could not understand how it could expand if it had no walls beyond which to do so. He compared the expanding of the Universe to the blowing up of a soap bubble. But the bubble had walls made of soap.

Again, this Universe might be of finite age, in which case it was created, I imagined by God. But Jeans stated there was no proof that the Universe was not of infinite age, in which case it was never created. That was the beginning of the end of my religious crisis.

The stumbling of my imagination over these and other questions reached a

climax in a letter to Einstein, composed by Uncle John. We felt we had to say we were sorry for using up the time of such a great man. Could we say 'encroach', or 'impinge'? No, these words were too difficult to come from the pen of somebody of my age.

But I *did* encroach upon his time. He answered every letter—even the most unimportant—that he received, and I have kept his answer to mine.

The Sister comforted me in my solitude, and bandaged my pride; Rainbow was my stimulus. His likeness to Marcel was in his big, lustrous black eyes, his pallid skin, and the mere wisp of his moustache. He was thin, complaining that the wind often cut into his fleshless flesh, and extremely poor. Rainbow was so poor he hardly ever smoked a pipe; he sucked it. It was his boast that one ounce of tobacco lasted him for several months. He lit his pipe in the morning, let it go out, and breathed the smell of dead tobacco for the rest of the day.

When I first wore long trousers, Rainbow congratulated me, saying how proud he himself had been when promoted to the honour. Like any other master he called me by my surname, so I took this opportunity to tell him he didn't know my Christian name. He said that he did know what it was.

'What is it, then?' I asked.

A pause ensued, at the end of which he said: 'Merlin.' I was ashamed, as when in the cool of the evening God walked through the Garden of Eden, and called: 'Eve.'

Atkins, with his sharp tongue, warned me: 'I hope you're on your guard against that man. But I'm sure that a judge of character like yourself will be all right.'

One Wednesday afternoon, when my dancing lessons had been stopped, I went for a walk with him in a neighbouring park. Rainbow was interested in medicine and psychology. Once he had fallen off a cliff into the Mediterranean, and said how odd it was he should be able to remember so exactly every event which had taken place just before and just after the accident (and yet the accident had been so many years ago). Rainbow could describe the events with an accuracy of detail equal to *In Remembrance of Things Past*. I was rather impressed, and wondered if he could put his knowledge of psychology to any practical use.

Suddenly we espied the owner of the park. He was flourishing a stick, and thought we were poachers.

'Mark my words,' Rainbow said. 'If we come up to him, and say we've lost the way, it'll be all right. But if we try to run away, he'll catch us up, and

we'll be in court. An elementary piece of psychology.'

The tactics succeeded admirably. We returned to Rainbow's room for tea. It was littered with eighty-nine books on psychology, and, as a reminder of his medical days, a giant treatise on the pumping of the human heart. He told me how he wanted to get married, but couldn't afford to till he had passed his exams and become a doctor. If he failed three times, he was disqualified. Twice, after he failed, he had fallen into rages. His nose had become the vulgar pink of Japanese cherry blossom, his face white like a shroud. His fiancée had understood these rages . . . , then, after his third failure, she had faded out of perspective.

Rainbow made some tea to which he added condensed milk. The milk was so revolting I wondered if he used it as manure for the cacti on his window sill.

We were silent for a minute or two, and when I had finished the first cup this silence was unexpectedly broken.

'Hush,' he said, 'I believe the Headmaster's outside. I'm so unpopular with him he'd better not find you in here with me.'

I was hustled out quickly.

At the end of the term Rainbow had to leave. His eighty-nine books on psychology were piled in the luggage van, and we travelled to Liverpool Street in the same compartment.

I said: 'We shall probably never meet again.'

He replied that I had stuck an arrow in his heart.

On reflection, I fancy Rainbow to have been a mere mortal like Cocteau; I was Pallas. It makes little difference if a man be transfixed with an arrow or a spear, he dies just the same.

The Athenians had chosen a proud goddess to rule over them. In this respect she was like all the other gods, who were so proud they refused to tolerate the same quality in ordinary men.

Pride, they seemed to say, must needs be stillborn.



LAWRENCE TOYNBEE *above* Passing the ball. *below* Squash racquets





LAWRENCE TOYNBEE *above* Cricket at Arundel. *below* Line-out 11



Some Notes on the Painting of Con- temporary Games

It would be wise, I suppose, to begin by explaining the title. The games to which I refer are those sporting events involving human beings pitted against one another in contests of skill, speed and strength. Many of them are team games with a number of players working in unison to achieve some basically abstract aim—such as the scoring of a goal, or the accumulation of a given number of runs—and to achieve this aim the team or the individual must overcome and outwit the opposition, while ensuring that their own actions remain within the laws of the game concerned. Such games—Association and Rugby Football, Cricket, Boxing, Rowing, Tennis, Squash, and so on are in fact very artificial rituals, but all of them seem to achieve a remarkable balance of physical and mental action when they are played well. Each of them has a potential perfection of a kind which is in itself very beautiful. We see glimpses of this in the bowling action of Lindwall, Cowdrey as he drives past extra-cover, Matthews dribbling and passing, and in the side-step and break of Sharp. These are only a few of the instances in which the playing of games seems at times to be art in itself. Even without these glimpses of perfection the games involve much that is visually exciting—the tension between the opponents, the rapid succession of actions all linked with one another, as when the ball is passed down the three-quarter line, or the bowler bowls, batsman plays and fielder runs to pick up, and the rhythms of purposeful, trained and concentrated movements by groups of human beings. These are the sort of things that interest a painter—the moving and beautiful shapes and colours and relationships of shapes and colours that the games reveal, rather than the games themselves.

These particular beauties, however, that can be discovered in the playing of games are intricately involved in the games themselves. Each game has its own particular nature dictated by the sort of physical actions it demands and by the rules and tactics employed in any given circumstances. The painter must understand and sympathize with the game he is painting if he is to

realize at all the potentialities of his subject. The Douanier Rousseau's footballers for instance fall quite outside the category of games pictures from this point of view. The same thing, again, applies in the painting of landscape—the painter must understand deeply and love the landscape which is to be the basis of his picture. The painter who does not understand the game he paints will almost certainly fail to discover its latent possibilities and will substitute his own imposed ideas often incompatible with the nature of the game and the picture will lack conviction and authority.

It is in this respect that the sporting pictures which I am discussing differ from the traditional types. The tradition might be said to have begun with hunting scenes on the cave walls at Lascaux and it can be seen in the wrestlers on Greek vases, Uccello's 'Night Hunt' (in the Ashmolean), Breughel's 'Skaters', Devis's early cricket pictures, even in the racecourse paintings of Monet, Degas and Toulouse Lautrec. In none of these does one feel quite this search for authenticity of movement, this groping for the special designs and actions which only one particular sport can reveal; and reveal it only to those who understand and know where to look. This is in no way intended to suggest that the works of art I have just mentioned are in any way rendered invalid by the absence of this expertise; I am trying only to define a difference in approach.

The first and most obvious difficulty arises from the speed of the movements involved. It is quite impossible to make studies and drawings while a match of any sort is actually in progress. It all happens so quickly and often unexpectedly: it is impossible to concentrate simultaneously on a whole series of separate yet intricately interdependent actions by different groups of figures; too often (from the painter's point of view) the development of some satisfactory and foreseeable situation is abruptly cut short by the opposition. In fact one does not seek to find the rhythms and shapes which might provide the basis for a painting in any particular incident or match, but rather in a more general recollected view of the game as a whole, remembered from years of watching or playing, approached in each case by way of a series of drawings which are altered and developed until the original idea gradually seems to take shape. Photographs of players in action seldom seem to help. It is practically impossible for a photographer to record a moment in which a whole group of players are in positions which clearly indicate both their own individual actions and the relationship between all these actions. These are patterns which must be worked out by thought and experiment. It is in trying to evolve this sort of drawing of figures in action that one realizes the enormous value of years of analytical drawing from the nude—a practice which some people

regard as an out-dated and pointless exercise.

All games involve a balance of violent activity and of rest. In some the quiet, still moments are very much part of the quality of the game, as when boxers size one another up before either launches an attack, or when one of them rests during a count; in others these moments are merely necessary pauses between periods of intense action, as the time between overs at cricket, or before a throw-in in the two codes of football. In these last instances there is little interest in the actions of the players, but in the case of boxing in particular it can be seen from pictures like Sam Rabin's how significant the still, waiting moment can be, and how much it can imply of past and future actions. In Rabin's pictures too one can see what use has been made of the static lines of the ropes, permanent and impersonal, cutting across the tense human shapes which are just about to burst into action.

In the painting of the most violently moving phases of games (mostly of Rugby Football so far) I have found that the introduction of purely static elements in this way is generally unsuccessful. The slightest over-emphasis of posts, stands, or white lines seems to freeze the movements of the figures rather than to add to them by contrast. The key to the expression of movement seems to lie in discovering the moment in any action when the rest of that action is clearly implicit. For example, it is possible, in drawing two figures giving and receiving a pass, to place the ball between them in such a position that its relationship to their arm and body movements makes the giving of the pass almost inevitable. It is this sort of relationship in space that has to be searched for in a series of sketches and studies, and I think it is clear that in order to make this search at all successfully the game must be understood.

Another problem that arises in the attempt to describe violent movement is that of simplification. Any over-elaboration of the figure, any attraction of the eye to detail which is not directly relevant to the movement, will at once immobilize the figure and contradict the action. One can see this most clearly demonstrated in press photographs of footballers spread-eagled in space without any clear indication of what they are doing. But this lack of meaning in the positions, or the treatment of the figures would be fatal to a painting in which the chief aim was the exposition and organization of the combined movements. The figures have to be simplified into basic shapes in which many individual features have to be suppressed so that the main directions and implications of movement may be brought out.

In the end one comes to the conclusion that some shapes move while others are static just as some combinations of colours and of tones seem in their own

nature to be active or stationary. As one struggles with these problems in their various settings as produced by different games or different aspects of one game, the possibilities and potentialities seem to grow greater and wider all the time. The possible combinations of figures moving or still are really limitless and yet all have something in common. The breadth of physical activity ranges from dance-like precision and lightness to what almost amounts to plain brutality; the groups can be as tight-knit as a scrummage or as scattered as the fielders in a cricket match; as crowded as a forward rush or as isolated as two players in a squash court. The variations and rhythms of moving figures in space are endless.

And these discoveries that a painter can make should be almost as interesting in themselves to those who have never seen the games concerned or shown any interest in them as they are to those who are experts. The final and basic aim of the artist is to search beyond the game itself and eventually to make discoveries about the human figure in space which are fundamental. The pictures should have far more in common with Michelangelo's 'Last Judgement' or Cezanne's or Renoir's bathers than with the sporting pages of the press.

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JOHN WHITING

The Critic on Trial

CURTAINS by Kenneth Tynan. (Longmans. 42s.)

JAMES AGATE. An Anthology, edited by Herbert van Thal. (Rupert Hart-Davis. 21s.)

The art of dramatic criticism makes great demands on its practitioners in this country. A man may be asked to review in any one week a new production of *Hamlet*, a Julian Slade musical, a new work by M. Sartre, an unknown play performed in Yiddish, and a night club singer's act. This must stretch the terms of reference of his job to breaking point. On the other hand, there are weeks in the year when nothing new turns up. The critic must then search around for a aunt sally, revisit a play for re-assessment, or, if he is as dedicated a man as Mr Tynan, make long journeys to remote places or even foreign parts in order to fill his column.

The physical dangers attending the job are not inconsiderable. Peak activity comes in the winter months. The reviewer of novels, general literature or gramophone records can stretch out in front of a fire with a drink, and even break off for a meal. The film critic, certainly, often has to attend a press showing at the nasty hour of ten o'clock in the morning, but the affair is private, with social pretension at a mini-

mum. The art critic can conduct his business at the hour of the day he finds most civilized, and does so in a well-heated gallery, coming and going at his leisure. Not so the dramatic critic. His rigid calendar dictates that he must get a taxi at an hour when they are at their shortest, drive, probably in the rain, to a building ill-suited both to his comfort and to the spectacle he is invited to see. Arriving there he will be required to pass among and sit among the elegant crowd which makes up a first night audience. With the dinner jackets and hired mink he will need to wear his plain brown suit like a badge of integrity. His seat may very well be badly situated.

It is only my well-known tolerance and absolute objectivity which has overcome the fact that on my last three visits to the Royal Court Theatre, as a guest of that management, I have been seated at the end of the back row, where I find it difficult both to see and hear. Let me say this position has made no difference to my attitude towards the productions. And I shall maintain this attitude even when the move comes, as I fear it must, to that small, sinister back lavatory and finally into the street.

In the interval the critic's refreshment is a strange, warm, brackish liquid, reserved for theatres, called whisky. At the end of the play, if he is on a daily paper, he must rush to some suitable and nearby place, preferably a restaurant, where he must try to eat a little something, be reasonably affable to the girl he is with, and at the same time scribble some coherent notes on a programme. Just as the soup arrives he must get up, find a telephone and send in his review. Returning, satisfied, work done, he may very well find his companion, who has

taken six hours to dress, bored and disconsolate, if not openly hostile. The only courses open to him will be to marry her, or find someone else to take to the next first night. The ruined love affairs of dramatic critics are a heart-breaking thing. And all this takes no account of the play the man has seen, which was probably terrible.

In the circumstances it is amazing that the standard of dramatic reviewing in England today is so high, and so little misanthropic.

At the very pinnacle stands Mr Kenneth Tynan. He is the man who dragged dramatic criticism, screaming, into the middle of the twentieth century. Before he began to write in the early 1950s, culminating in his famous weekly article in *The Observer*, dramatic criticism had been in the doldrums for many years. The theatre owes Mr Tynan a considerable debt.

We now have his collected dramatic criticism and related writings (some unpublished) in an impressive volume. It is divided into five parts covering the British, American, French, Russian and German theatres. The period covered is from 1951 to 1960, so that it forms not only a critical study but an historical record as well. It has always been one of Mr Tynan's greatest virtues that he has seen productions in this country in the context of the theatre of the world. Thirty years ago it would not have been reasonable to ask a man to pop over to Berlin, Vienna or Moscow to see a play. Now it is reasonable, and Mr Tynan often obliges. This is more than can be said for many of his colleagues. It is difficult to get them on a train for Bristol.

There is a pen portrait of myself in this book drawn, I take it, by inference

from my manner and the matter in a lecture I gave some years ago at the Old Vic. May I repay Mr Tynan the compliment by putting down how I see him after reading his book?

The first thing that strikes me is his honesty. This is apparent even from his preface where he wittily lays out his changed attitude to the theatre. 'I suspected that all really first-rate drama was about great men and dying and mourning.' This was his view of the theatre ten years ago. He goes on to say that he has come to realize that theatre is a branch of sociology as well as a means of self-expression. Now a critic who is aware of his own development is a rare thing. That is why I say Mr Tynan is honest.

Through the pages of this book comes the picture of a man who greatly cares for what he is doing, and, what is more, greatly cares for the institution he is writing about, the theatre. This is not a man who has parasitically attached himself so as to give himself material for a weekly article. Mr Tynan is as much a man of the theatre as are our best actors and directors.

A Byron in Greece, Mr Tynan has espoused the cause of the committed social drama, but some of the early dandyism remains which means that when mercenaries of the cause start making fools of themselves Mr Tynan is not taken in, and can prick balloons of pretension at the Royal Court just as well as anywhere else.

He writes fiendishly well. Almost alarmingly in touch with the jargon of the day he juggles it into his pure prose to form ironic and witty overtones. God knows, it is almost insulting to ask a playwright to get pleasure from reading a volume of dramatic criticism, yet

that is what I felt when reading this book.

That ephemeral art, the theatre, is dependent in the world of today, on that equally ephemeral art, theatrical journalism. By subscribing with such excellence to one Mr Tynan has done great service to the other. Not since Bernard Shaw has any man done more. Like Shaw, Mr Tynan has wonderful prejudices. What Ibsen was to Shaw, Brecht is to Mr Tynan. What Irving was to Shaw—well, Mr Tynan also has an Irving. More than one.

Many years ago, if I remember rightly, there was a weekly magazine called *Sporting and Dramatic*. It carried pictures of horses and actors. It must have died, I think, with James Agate, who so well typified the rather strange mixture.

Mr Herbert van Thal has made an anthology from the work of this famous dramatic critic, and there is not a word of dramatic criticism in it, as we would understand it today. Here is the theatre being ridden with the arrogance of a man on a donkey. And instead of admiring the fortitude of the beast, we are asked to admire the antics of the rider.

James Agate wrote amusingly about trivialities. Faced with something beyond his rather boorish comprehension he became both timid and shrill. It is alarming to see how in twenty years invective can become mere petulance.

To most young people working in the theatre today this book would be a total mystery. The jokes, so painfully recorded, seem arch, if not meaningless. The life, described in such detail, seems vulgar. The attitude to the theatre, both patronizing and off-hand, is pathetic. And there is a kind of repulsive snob-

bism pervading every page. For example, did fewer Englishmen speak French in those days than now? If not, why the fourth-form virtuosity in that language?

I put the book down with sadness. Here was a lifetime spent in recording a life of complete unimportance, using the theatre as a sound box. I believe there were eight volumes of *Ego*, Agate's autobiography in the form of a journal. What was the man trying to do? Convince himself that he existed? Convince us? The picture he has left is of a bore, a bully, a snob and more often than not a fool. Thank God he was dead before television got going, for here was a monumental figure to sink a discussion programme.

It is from this self-indulgent nonsense set against the background of the theatre that Mr Tynan has raised the art of dramatic criticism. He has set a standard which is being attempted, if not always attained, by others. Without pomposity, and indirectly, he has declared by his writings the function of a dramatic critic.

The man must be more concerned with his material than with his opinions. He must judge each work individually, and yet be capable of seeing it in the widest context. He must allow his prejudice enough scope to make him interesting to read, but not so much that we forget what he is writing about, which is a play. His knowledge of the technique of the theatre need not be great, but if it is he should not insist on it. All the same, he should know enough to be able to put the blame on the right person, whether it be playwright, actor or director. He should not use his position to dictate what should be written, produced or how and when

it should be done. He must remain in the unenviable position of taking what he is offered.

Mr Tynan fulfils all these things, except possibly the last, in his new book. And as for the last function I would rather Mr Tynan exercised it than any other writer on the theatre, for his belief in the theatre as an art, or if he prefers it, a branch of sociology, and his talent make him a rare man.

Music

NED ROREM

Pictures and Pieces

It is idle though not really odious to compare the arts, and people are always doing it. But they usually generalize on likeness, not disparity, lumping together all arts whose practitioners supposedly represent that portion of society which best enjoys 'the gift of self-realization'. No two expressions are more opposed than music and painting. Their function, the manner of their making, the characters of the workmen themselves are as dissimilar as the needs of their respective publics.

In childhood I believed that a given artist could have developed into any other kind—that he had only to choose between, say, prose or sculpture. Certainly all children are all things, close to natural truth and the origins of philosophy. Maturity's manners later stunt the imagination which had held a fantastic door ajar; to the more calloused

this door closes forever. Composers and painters, in retaining initial fancies, stay children. That seems their sole point in common, as though mutual receptivity had been smothered in adolescence. A fair percentage of plastic artists appear all but tone-deaf and some fine musicians are totally non-visual.

Picasso, for example, is scarcely reactive to sound; his ears prefer the Iberian nostalgia of bullfight trumpets to more sophisticated music. But his eyes are black diamond bullets which never miss their mark nor ever find repose.

Many a musician is blind to the world around him, though he knows the pitch of an auto horn, a robin's cry, a faucet dripping blocks away.

Those examples concern just eyes and ears because the Fine Arts are devoted to sight and hearing. Some permit alternate use of these two senses, but exclusivity is reserved for painting and music which present polar extremes of the seven arts.¹

I frequently hear cries that music has forsaken melody and grown abstract. It was always abstract. The complaint is really lodged against a lack of familiar tunes in new pieces. Familiar tunes, being music, are also abstract even when

¹ No serious art is dedicated to a stimulation of odour, taste or touch (though the blind are said to appreciate sculpture). Scriabine, before his death, projected a *Poem of Mystery* for performance on a mountain top. The audience while listening was to behold a colour screen, eat exotic foods, inhale perfume, and caress velvet. This forecasted the loving couple munching popcorn at the movies and would also have proved no more than pleasurable confusion. It is impossible to react simultaneously to all five senses in full indulgence. Even the motion-picture addict, as we shall see, is usually unaware of the musical soundtrack except—as in musical comedies—where sound is an end in itself.

using words. Words help recall tunes thus making them familiar, but it is the verbal associations only which lend literal sense to sound.

Essentially music is abstract and painting is representational despite what we hear to the contrary. Music has no intellectual significance, no meaning outside itself. This is not less true of so-called programmatic than of absolute music wherein subjective connotations are not intended.

I believe that painting does have meaning outside itself. When abstract painters profess a striving to eliminate representation their very effort implies camouflage. A musician feels no compunction to disguise 'subject matter' and might even attempt to reveal it, safely assured that logicians will never decipher and expose his secret thoughts. No inquisition can intelligibly reproach a composer as it can a Goya for subversive or obscene notions.

Richard Strauss once declared himself capable of breaking a fork on a table through sound alone. Certainly his tone poems evoke realistic windmills, bleating sheep, human chatter and such like. Any competent orchestrator can simulate worldly noises without much trouble, just as a talented mimic can bark like a dog. (Charlie Chaplin, they say, once performed an aria, and quite beautifully, to everyone's amazement. 'I can't really sing at all,' he explained later. 'I was just doing my Caruso number!') The closer these copies approach reality the farther they retreat from creation. Wilde's paradox 'Nature imitates Art', is not really a paradox at all.

If we were not informed of Strauss's fork or sheep we'd either invent our own associations or listen as if to 'pure' music. If told that these sounds meant knives

or seagulls we'd leave it at that. In music an image is no more than approximate.

Each century gives conventional symbols to general moods. In recent western music the minor key means sad, though it had no such suggestion three hundred years ago; who, for example, is saddened today by the carol *God Rest You Merry Gentlemen*? The mode of C-major is supposed to be happy, but the Spartans considered it lascivious (which is not always the same thing). We don't disagree on what is termed joyous, tragic or ecstatic, except when we read into the style of one musical period that which refers to another. In pictures, however, a wedding or funeral always mean just that, no matter when or where they were made.

Music is probably the least international of languages. During two years in Morocco I never encountered a native who could fathom our formal music any more than our Christian values. Only in the past century, and to us of the west, do Strauss's sheep or Ravel's sad birds, Respighi's trees or Honegger's engine, signify themselves in sound through habit and suggestion. And yet, when he knows what it represents, who hearing Britten's 'Sick Rose', for instance, can restrain a spinal chill when that worm-like horn bores into the flower's heart? An arab would not see this as we do—through the ears. We also, were we not told beforehand of the intended association, would miss our guess nine times out of ten even with such broad themes as love and war, festivity and madness. Scientific experiments have proved it. Gone are the days when Carl Maria von Weber's diminished-seventh tremolos will scare anyone.

Music's inherent abstraction is what renders it so malleable in collaborative

fields. A choreographer may mould a narrative around absolute music, or effectively revise the story line of a programmatic work. Robbins's ballet on 'The Afternoon of a Faun' is as plausible as Nijinsky's. And Nijinsky's version of 'The Rite of Spring' was no more catastrophic than Disney's. Stravinsky's masterpiece which suffocated both ballet and film survives uniquely in concert halls. Music can make or break a ballet because sound is necessary to the dance. And although audiences will take a good deal more of the 'unfamiliar' in spectacles which mix the arts than in music alone, when sound dominates the visual they revolt—as in the famous case of 'The Rite of Spring'.

Music is less integral to the film medium so even greater risks can be run. A musically untutored movie audience accepts without flinching a score whose audacity, if heard in concert, would send the élite yelling for mercy. The public is, and should be, mostly unconscious of movie music; a background fails when it distracts from central business. But such is music's strength that it may sugar a tasteless film or poison one of quality. A recent drama of capital punishment, 'I Want to Live', excited extra tension through its soundtrack of progressive jazz. 'On the Beach' whose subject was more timely still (being about terrestrial death through radioactivity) was devitalized by a second-rate score with old-fashioned associations.

Nearly any music may persuasively accompany any image or story while inevitably dictating the *tone* of the joint effort. Music's power lies in an absence of human significance and this power dominates all mediums in contacts. When Auric composed the score for Jean Cocteau's film 'The Blood of a Poet' he

produced what is commonly known as love music for love scenes, game music for game scenes, funeral music for funeral scenes. Cocteau had the bright idea of replacing the love music with the funeral, game music with the love, funeral with game. And it worked because the music itself was good, adding more novelty to an already strange ambiance. Nor did Cocteau commission a composer for his ballet of a modern young painter who hangs himself on stage; he used a passacaglia of Bach whose clash with the present ignited the eternal.

To convey through music a non-musical idea three formulas are available: the tone picture, the tone poem, and the incidental background for plays.

Tone pictures are puns which never need explanation to be enjoyed. The majority refer to aspects of nature, usually water or birds, or vistas including both, in specified attitudes at specified times of day. They may use the same title without necessarily sounding alike. How many pieces are called *The Fountain*! More rare are resemblant musics with diverse significance. The opening bars of Debussy's *Clouds*, of Moussorgsky's *Four Walls*, and of Stravinsky's *Nightingale* are too similar for coincidence yet their literary intentions are unrelated. Different means are tried for the same subject and the same means for different subjects, but the musician won't name a work *Abstraction*—he doesn't have to. Nevertheless he can't truly expect us to see sounds any more than we hear paint. The well-wrought sonorous landscape by any other name would sound as sweet.

Tone poems tell stories. As a rule they involve direct emotions indirectly transported on wings of wordless song

through fire, jealousy and death. Like good tone pictures they possess abstract coherence without a programme.

The third division, the incidental background for plays, in turn serves three purposes, all very general. The first is for indicating weather conditions and originates from the tone picture. The second is for love scenes and derives from the tone poem. The third is for quieting the audience or getting actors on and off stage, and stems from the military fanfare. These functions can be understood as placid mornings or storms, tender or quarrelling passion, nostalgia or foreboding, and the passage of various periods of time. Music is never more explicit.

Actual paintings sometimes inspire music. The most famous example is *Pictures at an Exhibition*. And recent new works by Diamond and Schuller used paintings of Paul Klee as 'theme'. Klee himself once said: 'Art does not render the visible, but renders visible.' He was speaking, I imagine, only of plastic art. It remains doubtful that his painting is rendered more visible as interpreted through an unrelated medium. Hindemith maintains that 'the reactions music evokes are not feelings, but . . . memories of feelings'. If a composer enjoins us to recall emotions about a picture he distracts attention from his piece, since concentration is not wholly directed to more than one thing at a time.

Dallapiccola arranges notes on a staff to look like the Cross of Christ. Of course we don't hear a cross any more than we see tomorrow. If impatience leads us to conclude that certain music, like children, should be seen and not heard, Dallapiccola's device is not for that disqualified. Do the typographical designs

of Cummings's poetry disturb it when read aloud? or does the holy '3' of liturgical chant oblige us to feel the Trinity rather than a metrical pulse? Tricks are valid when used as cause and not effect. We judge by expressive results. . . . Virgil Thomson has posed people for musical portraits. This too is a means to an end like re-evaluating pictures by sound. The tonal image provides impetus to build an ultimate abstraction.

In like manner a painter on a dull day may 'get himself going' by drawing geometric forms which eventually become representational. To Mondrian or Albers the geometric presents an end in itself. Dare I say this end is also representational? (The sceptic maintains such painting is merely unfinished while the Freudian finds in it heaven knows how many symbols.) Of course it is representational: nature abounds in geometry as she abounds in vibrations from which music is fashioned; yet psychoanalysts are shy of chords and scales.¹

Artists, like children, resist alienation from nature. None seek to copy so much as to join nature by opening a glass door to which they alone hold the key, but through which others can look. Painting's connection with nature (whether geometric or photographic) is more apparent than music's. The latter, like architecture, proceeds in indirect simulation by subduing inspiration to calculation. Its 'unnatural' components are what render it the abstractest art, for one musical sound has meaning only in ordered relation to another, while in nature sound has unordered meaning in itself.

¹ It would be amusing to speculate about Ravel's fixation on the descending fourth whenever he sets the word 'mother' to music!

The truest relation between artists is not as thinkers but as doers obsessed with organized self-discovery. Composer and painter alike feel toward the tools of their expression as interpreters toward their instrument. The dishevelled neatness atop the piano, the easel and chisel, pencil and paper, the assemblage of colours and staves and inks and rulers are as tenderly disinterested and aggravating as twins to these men. Both of them while working inhabit a strenuous cocoon removed from time and space, the better to deal objectively with space and time—for both share the immediate while in the act of making. The logic of hindsight alone demonstrates their dissimilar intentions.

I have wished to dispel a fallacy by showing art as an active matter not to be judged by stodgy standards. My premise has been that music and painting are less resemblant than generally supposed. Any theory which questions bromides is valid. Perhaps sometime I'll try proving that music is never abstract, painting always is. Such an approach merged with the present one might allow that pictures and pieces are really the same. A discouraging assumption. After all, if the arts could express each other we wouldn't need more than one.

Selected Books

JOHN DOUGLAS PRINGLE

Artist and Chariot

RIDERS IN THE CHARIOT by Patrick White. (Eyre and Spottiswoode. 21s.)

Patrick White is an all-or-nothing novelist. He makes great demands on the

reader and great claims. Formidable in size—*Riders in the Chariot* has 552 pages—his books are still more formidable in the sweep of their subject matter. The ordinary and the humdrum never appear except, perhaps, as objects of derision. He prefers the loftiest themes, the most bizarre characters. One could not say of Patrick White that he is 'quite a good writer': either he is a great writer or nothing. Reading his pages one recognizes Browning's Grammarian:

He ventured neck or nothing—
heaven's success

Found, or earth's failure:

'Wilt thou trust death or not?' he
answered 'Yes.

Hence with life's pale lure!'

Moreover Patrick White's ambition is still growing. Take the last three novels which have made his reputation. *The Tree of Man* was ostensibly the story of a small farmer hacking his living out of the bush near Sydney; but it was also an Australian *Everyman*, stiff—too stiff—with allegory. *Voss* was an epic poem in which Patrick White used the vision-haunted character of the German explorer to express his own passionate commitment to the Australian continent. And *Riders in the Chariot*? If it were possible to compress so huge and extravagant a story—it is really four novels in one—into a single sentence, one would say it is about the validity of different kinds of religious experience; but it is also about Jews and anti-semitism, about madness, innocence, racialism, the corruption of modern civilization. And its four principal characters—a madwoman, a German Jewish scholar, a half-caste aboriginal genius and a simple English woman immigrant are swept together into a

Sydney suburb to take part in a violent religious drama which ends in the crucifixion of the Jew on Good Friday and the death of all the characters except one—the English woman whose simplicity and capacity for love alone seem to modify Patrick White's pessimism.

Described like this, *Riders in the Chariot* sounds totally unmanageable. And in a sense it is. There is something too artificial, too strained in the parallel of the crucifixion even though, in the story, the old Jew Himmelfarb is strung up to a jacaranda tree as a practical joke by a crowd of drunken Australians. (Patrick White even provides a Judas Iscariot in the character of another Jewish immigrant, a successful business man, who denies his faith and then hangs himself after Himmelfarb's death.) The connection between the four main characters is too slight and too mystical to be wholly convincing.

Yet one feels that this criticism, though perfectly valid, is rather like pointing out the obvious errors in the time scheme of *Othello*. It hardly affects the overwhelming, mediaeval, crushing impression which the book makes. Moreover the four separate stories out of which the book is constructed—the lives of the four main characters—are all superbly done. Patrick White has written brilliantly about madness before in *The Aunt's Story*, but that madness was of a mild and tentative kind. With Miss Hare, who lives alone in a decaying mansion in the bush, he goes much further, further even than Dostoevsky in *The Idiot*. For Miss Hare, in the eyes of the vulgar whom Patrick White despises so ferociously, is not merely 'simple' and subject to fits, but deformed, brutish and obscene. Yet Patrick White enters her mind with the

most daring imagination and complete conviction and endows her with an understanding that is both more and less than human—half animal, half divine.

Wonderful though this part of the book is, it is overshadowed by the still more powerful portrait of the old Jew Himmelfarb. This is not a sketch. Patrick White tells the story of the Jew in detail, from his birth in an East German town through the first war and the Nazi persecution to the second war, the concentration camp and escape to Israel and Australia. It is not only the picture of a man; it is a picture of a people. Has any non-Jew, has any Jew, for that matter, written more movingly of the Jewish race and the Jewish religion? At the end, perhaps, Himmelfarb is endowed with such superhuman virtues that he ceases to be real—at one point there is even the suggestion that he is the true Saviour for whom the Jews have waited so long—but the description of his Calvary in Germany and Australia is magnificent.

The stories of Mrs Godbold, the simple English immigrant, and Dubbo, the half-caste aboriginal painter, are slightly less successful but only in comparison with these two. To me Mrs Godbold was the most sympathetic character in the book because she was the most human, but simplicity is not the easiest material for any novelist and Patrick White is too complicated a person to understand it. As for Dubbo, the uneducated aboriginal who is also a self-taught genius as a painter, he is perhaps too complicated even for Patrick White. Yet his attempt to describe the mental processes of a painter are fascinating and one remembers with respect that Patrick White is a close friend of Roy

de Maistre and Sidney Nolan, who both, perhaps, have helped to fashion it.

The message of the book is less clear and less happy. The four characters all share a religious faith and a vision of the Chariot. Miss Hare's faith is pagan, an intuition which can distinguish good from evil by touch and finds good more in animals and birds and trees than in men. Her vision of the Chariot is the setting sun though she has never heard and could not understand the Greek myth of Apollo. Himmelfarb is an Orthodox Jew who finds his Chariot in the prophecy of Ezekiel. Dubbo is nominally a Christian—his first experience of religion is to be seduced by an Anglican parson!—who discovers the meaning of Christianity after the crucifixion of the Jew. But he is also an artist and he too has seen the Chariot in a print by a French artist (Boucher?) though his own vision is very different. Mrs Godbold—the very names are symbolical as in *Pilgrim's Progress*—is a Methodist who sings hymns as she washes her sheets, and one of her favourite hymns is about 'the King in royal state Riding in the clouds his chariot To His heavenly palace gate'.

Patrick White seems to suggest (as indeed Christ did) that it is easier for the poor, the simple, and the illiterate to see the Chariot than for the rich, the educated and the sophisticated. (Though the artist has a chance.) Reason is despised as ultimately futile, and, provided the faith is genuine, it does not matter much what it is. Judging by this book one might imagine that Patrick White himself finds the Jewish religion the most attractive and the Catholic religion the least (because it is the least simple?), but Mrs Godbold tells us

specifically that there is no real difference.

One might accept this estimate of the supreme value of religious or mystical experience of any kind more easily if it was not matched by a distrust of reason and by an apparent dislike of humanity itself. There is something disturbingly Swiftian about certain passages in *Riders in the Chariot* which was not noticeable in the previous novels. It is not only contemporary urban, material civilization which seems to anger Patrick White but human beings as such. The book is full of horrifying descriptions of naked sagging bodies and grey skin. Sex, both normal and abnormal—there is a good deal of both—is always crude, obscene and, too often, commercial as well. I lost count of the number of times this sensitive and poetic writer used the word 'piss' to express his loathing.

In *Riders in the Chariot* his loathing is directed chiefly against contemporary Australian civilization and—dare one say it?—contemporary Australians. Patrick White is himself an Australian who has chosen to live and work in Australia after spending many years in England. Voss and *The Tree of Man* proved his passionate commitment to his country. But *Riders in the Chariot* shows that this love is very far from the kind of patriotism that other Australians would appreciate. Indeed it is restricted almost entirely to a fierce, devouring love for the physical nature of Australia, for its bright light and pale colours, its strange birds and spiky plants: for the ordinary Australian he seems to have nothing but contempt.

It is not merely that, of the four main characters held up for our admiration, two are foreigners, one an abo and one

mad, but that all the many minor characters in the book who are Australians are actively vile. Mrs Jolley and Mrs Flack are embodiments of evil. The rich socialite, Mrs Chalmers-Robinson, the 'decent bloke' Ernie Theobalds, the whores and puffers and drunken louts—none of them is spared. There can be few more savage pieces of satire than the passage in which Ernie Theobalds explains to Himmelfarb, who has just been cut down from the tree, the virtues of the Australian way of life and the Australian sense of humour. As for Sydney, Patrick White seems to see it as flooded with pools of vomit! As one who has dared to criticize the Australians quite mildly, and suffered for it, I shudder for Patrick White.

Like all his books, *Riders in the Chariot* is not easy to read. It is not meant to be. Patrick White has deliberately chosen a style which forces us to read every sentence slowly. In a period when the mainstream of literary fashion is to make novels shorter and easier, Patrick White makes them longer and harder. Nothing is said simply. No statement is left to speak for itself.

'You should go home,' she said, altering her voice, although it was some time since she had used it.

'We must certainly pray for you,' Malke Himmelfarb remarked gently, hanging her head above the now crumpled and rejected sock. 'My poor son!'

'Well,' she said, 'it has been lovely, Mrs Flack. And now I must get back to that poor lady of mine.' And sniffed and smiled and blinked at once.

These quotations, taken at random from

different passages, are very typical of the dialogue. The effect, hesitant, cautious, frequently qualified, is curiously old-fashioned. It reminds one of Henry James or even of Dickens.

Of course the more poetic and descriptive passages are very different. Sometimes, admittedly, there is a lushness, a kind of Sitwellian softness about the prose which makes one understand how A. D. Hope, Australia's best poet and one of her best critics, was driven to describe *The Tree of Man* as 'pretentious and illiterate verbal sludge'. (A judgement White has never forgiven.) For instance, can one really admire such a passage as this?

From where she listened it was faint but sure, although whether it was coming from a great depth, or horizontal distance, it was quite impossible to tell. It was all around and under her: the grey sound that is given out by tunnels, and the mouths of elephants, and sleepers turning in a dream, and earth falling in a veil from a considerable height.

Yet Patrick White can write sharply and with great precision when he wants as in this description of a derelict harlot in the outback:

The woman must have been white once, but the sun and her pursuits had cured her, until she now presented the colour and texture of mature bacon. She was thin enough, but might have plumped out with teeth. Inside the cotton dress, her breasts suggested small but active animals. Trying to jump at you, it appeared at times. She had those old, blue eyes which bring back cold, windy days, and not even a crow in the sky. That was not to say she did not see a great deal; she would have identi-

fied what was stowed away under the seat of a stranger's sulky, even if the object had been wrapped in several bags.

But finest of all are those passages in which Patrick White describes the visions of Miss Hare. If there is nothing quite so good as one or two passages in *Voss*—Voss dying in the desert and the girl watching his ship pass down Sydney harbour—there are many that I find deeply moving. For Patrick White is a poet doing in prose, as another Australian poet, James McAuley, once said, what poets used to do in verse but now do no longer. A hundred years ago he would have written great, long Shelleyan poems. Today he writes novels filled with passages like this:

So she would wait, with the breath fluctuating in her lungs, and the blood thrilling through her distended veins. She waited on the last evening before the person called Mrs Jolley was expected to arrive. And sure enough, the wheels began to plough the tranquil fields of white sky. She could feel the breath of horses on her battered cheeks. She was lifted up, the wind blowing between the open sticks of fingers that she held extended on stumps of arms, the gold of her father's bloodstone ring echoing the gold of trumpets. If on the evening before the arrival of a certain person, an aura of terror had contracted round her, she could not have said, at that precise moment, whether it was for the first time. She could not remember. She was aware only of her present anguish. Of her mind leaving her. The filthy waves that floated off the fragments of disintegrating flesh.

Later, when she got up from the ground, she did not attempt to inquire

into what might have bludgeoned her numb mind and aching body, for night had come, cold and black. She bruised knuckle on knuckle, to try to stop her shivering, and began to feel her way through the house, by stages of brocade, and vicious gilt, by slippery tortoiseshell, and coldest unresponsive marble.

If I had to answer the question implied in my first paragraph, I would say that Patrick White is a great writer. As one who, put off by the turgidities of *The Tree of Man*, doubted the extent of his talent when I was in Australia, I am glad to make this amend, though I shall never be one of the riders in his chariot.

SIMON RAVEN

Crusader of our Time

'The enemy at last was plain in view,' wrote Evelyn Waugh in the first pages of the *Crouchback* trilogy,¹ 'huge and hateful, all disguise cast off. It was the Modern Age in arms.' The call had come late but it had come very clear; and Guy Crouchback, devout, dim, well bred, unloved, a Roman Catholic whose faith had turned as sour on him as his useless middle life, set out in 1939 to offer his sword in the Crusade. At last, in the struggle against the massed forces of evil, his existence and his faith would have a meaning.

¹ *Men at Arms* (Chapman & Hall, 15s.), 1952; *Officers and Gentlemen* (Chapman & Hall, 12s. 6d.), 1955; *Unconditional Surrender, The Conclusion of Men at Arms and Officers and Gentlemen*, by Evelyn Waugh (Chapman & Hall, 18s.), 1961.

For a time at least the issues continue equally plain. Guy is commissioned into the Halberdiers, an estimable and efficient corps officered by decent men of the middle class (and obviously owing much in its conception to Mr Waugh's service with the Royal Marines). There is no room for doubt in the Mess of the Halberdiers, and even the very mixed bunch of temporary officers who are in training with Guy take on something of the steadiness and dignity prescribed by Halberdier tradition. But *Men at Arms* has not advanced far before another element obtrudes itself. Various anarchic, mocking, treacherous, brutal or merely slapstick, this element is one which has always pre-occupied Mr Waugh and which we may loosely call the 'B-Factor' ('B' for Basil). Like Mr Waugh's immortal Basil Seal, from whom I derive the term, the B-Factor knows nothing of justice or guilt, of faiths or causes, of past precedent or future obligation: it may be compared to the demon of pantomime (for it is often convenient to personalize the B-Factor), who pops out of the ground unheralded to interfere, with equal relish, in small affairs or great, to heap prizes on men of straw and humiliation on the steadfast; and who, easily bored, disappears as suddenly as he came, so that for a while a rational pattern of action and dialogue may be resumed—until the trap-door in the stage releases him once more.

In *Men at Arms* there are Basil Incubi lurking in two men—in a distasteful junior officer called Trimmer and in Guy's commander, Brigadier Ritchie-Hook. In Trimmer's case, the poltergeist lies dormant until the next volume. Ritchie-Hook, on the other hand, has an ungovernable appetite for

violent mischief ('biffing') which is immediately and scandalously apparent. While he appears to Guy as heroic, he effectively confuses the simple dichotomy of right and wrong with which the book began; for this 'stupendous warrior', a pillar of the righteous beyond doubt, yet perpetrates irresponsible acts of extreme malice and so viciously 'biffs' Guy's friend Apthorpe with a booby-trap that Apthorpe falls into a decline and dies. With all this, and with the chaos of summer 1940, it is not surprising that Guy the Crusader shows signs of faltering. However, he can still reflect, near the end of the book, that the two moral justifications for lawful war, 'a just cause and the chance of victory', are behind himself and his companions: the way to the Holy Land, while more devious than it had seemed, is still ostensible.

But in the second volume, *Officers and Gentlemen*, the road descends into the Valley of Despair and there stops dead. Transferred from the worthy Halberdiers to a Commando Unit composed of officers and men from the smarter regiments, Guy at first persuades himself that he is serving with the flower of English chivalry and is again content. But the B-Factor, ever inimical to peace of mind, now re-emerges in characteristic style. The noxious Trimmer seduces Guy's ex-wife and is acclaimed (bogusly) a hero. Russia becomes an ally and to Guy's thinking dishonours the cause of England. A Catholic priest turns out to be an enemy agent. And then, worst of all, during a brilliant sequence which describes the fall of Crète, Guy's friend Ivor Clare, whom he had seen as a true knight, deserts his men in the field. Guy himself is only rescued by a homosexual warrant officer (whom he suspects of

murder) called Ludovic; and when he arrives back in Alexandria he finds nothing but equivocation, whether about the general conduct of the war or the particular and contemptible conduct of Clare. The book ends, as Mr Waugh himself remarks on the dust jacket, with Guy's total deflation.

At this stage two comments are called for. First, though I have read both these volumes several times, I have yet to find a single word out of place. Whether one considers syntax and style, or the wider technical issues of plotting, rhythm and construction, these books are as near faultless as it is possible for novels to be. Secondly, Mr Waugh's understanding of military custom and practice, like his characterization, is immaculate: he does not miss the smallest nuance of behaviour, whether in the Mess, on the barrack square, or in the field itself. I should also say at once that on the strength of my brief acquaintance with the newly-published third volume I believe it to have all the excellence of its forerunners. It is only when we consider Mr Waugh's theme that some people at least may have their doubts; and this leads us to the pertinent question—why, in any case, has Mr. Waugh written a third volume? 'I thought at first that the story would run into three volumes,' he writes on the dust jacket of *Officers and Gentlemen*: 'I find that two will do the trick.' But now we have—and I for one am very grateful to have—*Unconditional Surrender*, specifically sub-titled as 'The Conclusion of Men at Arms and Officers and Gentlemen'. What prompted this change of mind?

It is a question less of the mind, I think, than of the conscience. *Officers and Gentlemen* ends in despair: *Uncon-*

ditional Surrender, despite the implications of this title, brings Guy to reconciliation. In the face of world-wide evil, not to mention the multitudinous malignance of the Basil-Factor, it is binding on Guy Crouchback and his creator, as practising Roman Catholics, to rouse themselves from despair and find some sort of an answer. Since the Crusade has been reduced to chaos and disgrace, the communist forces of evil being now intermingled with the pilgrims, this answer must be individual and personal. For Guy it turns out to lie in acts of self-sacrifice and mercy.

Others find different ways out. With all the panache and technical assurance of the first two volumes, we are told how the homosexual and godless Ludovic turns his back on an intolerable truth to become a romantic novelist, or how Ritchie-Hook, now worn out and disregarded, virtually commits suicide in a final orgy of heroic 'biffing'. But for Guy there can now only be 'some small service which only he could perform, for which he had been created'. He awaits the summons, which will not be the trumpet call of 1939 but the still, small prompting of the heart. And here again the perennial B-Factor plays its part. Having got Guy's ex-wife pregnant by the atrocious Trimmer, the demon presents her to Guy—defeated, graceless, afraid. Guy pities her, re-marries her, knowingly has Trimmer's child fathered on him: a 'service which only he could perform'.

But his full reconciliation has yet to come, and it comes in, of all places, Yugoslavia. In the midst of some vicious fun at the expense of the partisans (who embody the B-Factor in its most absurd and dangerous form), Mr Waugh discovers to Guy some displaced Jews. De-

spite the blatant hostility of the communists Guy does his best for them and eventually enables most of them to escape to Italy—but not before the futility of his pilgrimage, as he originally conceived it, is finally made plain to him:

'It seems to me,' [says a Jewess] 'there was a will to war, a death wish, everywhere. Even good men thought their private honour would be satisfied by war. . . .'

'God forgive me,' said Guy. 'I was one of them.'

Thus is Guy made to realize the true nature of the illusion which sent him so eagerly to arms in 1939. He has taken part, not in a Crusade, but in a meaningless holocaust which was the product of the death wish, of desperation, or even of mere boredom. Victory is also meaningless, because England is now aligned with allies as vile as the enemy it has conquered: what triumph there is goes to the B-Factor which has brought such corruption about. The only things that have meaning are private—his act of mercy toward the Jews and the self-sacrifice by which he sought to save his wife.

Mr Waugh will cause offence, as he invites mockery, by so clearly equating evil not only with communism but also with religious apostasy and, in general, with all 'enlightened' trends. The plain fact remains that he finds salvation for his hero in two personal actions, neither of which need necessarily carry religious or doctrinaire import. Granted, for Guy Crouchback his actions do have religious significance, but they are also valid in the name of common decency and so they are valid for all of us. If unoriginal, this is surely unexceptionable. The first two volumes of this trilogy assert that honour has collapsed

and that the traditional concepts underlying military practice are no longer viable. The third volume claims a limited but real victory for individual dignity, for the private face. But we must be wary. Ritchie-Hook may be dead, but Trimmer has only disappeared (believed to have jumped ship in South Africa). Trimmer could turn up on any day of the week, and even if he doesn't the Basil-Incubi are always busy finding new and plausible hosts.

RONALD BRYDEN

The Last Golden Moustache

The flamingo colours of an Indian sunset slant down the plains to crimson a sinking Union Jack. A last bugle sounds somewhere down the Lines. From the rear-verandah of a bungalow, a man in the dress of a low-caste Hindu slips into the dusk of a mango-tree, a man with heavy black hair, lean jaw and eyes brilliantly, curiously blue in so brown a face. . . .

I fell in with the Masters underground five years ago. I had drifted up from an Ian Fleming cell, where they discussed the name of Bond's public school and the nature of his masochism; not, as I explained to a girl-comrade, that I'd suffered any moral or literary rearmament, it was simply that Commander Fleming's discovery of the marine terrors of my Caribbean childhood removed the books, for me, from the realm of fantasy. Cryptically, she held out *Nightrunners of Bengal*, said: 'Have you read any of this man?' and

in due course inducted me into the Kensington circle to which she had covertly switched loyalties some months earlier. Here discussion ran on the degrees of the Savage family's hereditary father-fixations and of the implausibilities these had goaded them to in three centuries of Indian empire-building. 'The best's the bit in *Lotus and the Wind* where Lenya Muralev poisons all the Karakum wells.' 'Oh, what about the end of *Deceivers*, when the bees sting the entire Thug gang to death?'

Our tone was the shameful glee of people confessing childhood indecencies or school crushes on Errol Flynn. It established our adult detachment from our frivolity, paving the way for semi-serious justification. 'After all, the Thug's material's straight out of *Slee-man*, and the Mutiny detail. . . .' 'He's fair enough to Congress in the last one—the anglophile prince is made pretty ineffectual.' But these were ritual protestations. We knew our shared guilt: what we were indulging was intellectual vice blacker in our code than any gratified by Bond's gloating torturers. We prided ourselves we were liberals, left-wing, 'literary'. It was the bitter winter after Suez, our sodden pamphlets strewn Trafalgar Square. Yet here we were revelling in walnut-stained exploits beyond the Khyber, in last-minute rescues by John Company's lancers, in the parrot-splendours, raw silks, jewels and regimentals, of a Calcutta Residency ball. We were allowing ourselves vanished, forbidden pleasures, nostalgia for the unrecoverable simplicity of a dead and deadly virtue. For us, the saga of the Savages, heroes and conquistadors of the Raj, was a political pornography in which we savoured the illicit sensualities of imperialism.

Part of each age is its special unreality: the fantasies and falsifications it permits itself, its comforting myths. Serious literature has to recognize them—both ways, exposing and acknowledging—in comedy, by parody and satire. But they can also build a counter-literature of their own, equivalent in architecture and pretension, a pornography of those instincts the age denies. An era of conscience produces *Madame Bovary's* reading; an era of sexuality its Julian Slade; an era of unbelief its Corvo and Charles Morgan. But their solemnity cannot survive the touch of the world; they have to clothe themselves in an insulation of un-seriousness, a sheath of comic protection forced on their readers. You have to smile apologetically for owning them, laugh when challenged to defend them, protest their merits with mock-indignation. For theirs is the literature of tolerated pretence: which demands the suspension, not of disbelief, but of belief. That comic protectiveness is the price each period pays for flirting with illusions it knows it cannot have. It is the tone in which an age of agnosticism, insular domesticity and imperial retrenchment can devour the fiction of John Masters.

It does, because his novels peddle discreetly three things such a generation yearns for. One is the lost simplicity of sexlessness. True, almost every Masters novel ostensibly revolves about a problem of the marriage-bed, thrashed out sweatily and graphically by each Savage heir and his bride beneath their mosquito nets. But the problem is always the same—the pull of the Savage men toward a masculine world of adventure, nomadry and stoicism. At night they seem to surrender to their

women, but by dawn, while the sated victrix drowns confidently, they are off on India's endless, blinding roads, vanished in her bazaars' swarming anonymity, bound for the frozen solitudes of the Himalayas. It is the world of childhood reading, familiar, uncomplicated; of Henty, Ballantyne, Buchan, Conan Doyle; no more thrilling in its dangers than in its safety from eroticism.

But behind this escape to childhood lies an even greater contraband pleasure: the confidence and simplicity of an unquestioned image of virtue. Here again, Masters camouflages his wares with sophistication: each Savage, on the face of it, is a bundle of doubt, uneasy about power, the need to kill, about his own instincts. He is always a slight imperial anachronism, devoted to Indian India, hating the colour-bar, worried over Britain's right to this sprawling empire. But this only reassures our modern consciences that his moral decisions will be right; and what he chooses is his imperial duty—taming the wild tribes, extending the Raj's justice, resisting India's many-armed blue goddesses. He accepts the white man's burden of authority, and with secret delight we accept his acceptance. For he is the secure old image of the Good Englishman, the last of the golden moustaches: courageous, narrow, merciful and confident that the civilization he brings justifies all shifts of power and conquest. He can conform, for he believes what he conforms to. It is an image irrelevant to us, so inapplicable that to cling to it is moral abdication; but we have no new Good Englishman yet to take his place, and the charm of his certainty is overwhelming.

We can accept him because Masters

presents him with conscientious good faith. He can do so because he himself is one of the last of those Good Englishmen. This is what emerges from his two volumes of autobiography, *Bugles and a Tiger* and *The Road Past Mandalay*.¹ Himself descended from a family with five generations of service in India, he went straight at nineteen from a centurion's schooling (Wellington, Sandhurst) to the goal of countless Newbolt subalterns: the Frontier, the barbarian limit of the Raj which moves in his novels from the Mahratta borders, across Sind, to its resting-place on the Afghan foothills. *Bugles and a Tiger* told how the Indian Army shaped him: knocking off the corners of individualism, fastening him to his Ghurka regiment so that he could imagine no home but its glassed-in mess 3,000 feet above the Punjab, walls loaded with tusks and prints, tables with Victorian silver; no brothers closer than his smiling, ugly little troops whose favourite term of abuse was 'O one pubic hair!' He learned service, the unworried use of subordination and authority, how to kill without question. He can still write without embarrassment of the honour of a soldier's profession, the honour of war.

But *The Road to Mandalay* tells, frankly and movingly, how this training was put to practical test. When the war broke out, Masters was sent to Staff College at Quetta, where he fell in love with the wife of another officer. To have become involved in a divorce would have meant resigning his commission; they took furtive holidays together, finally she left home and bore him a child out of wedlock. Meanwhile,

¹ *The Road Past Mandalay* by John Masters. Michael Joseph, 21s.

Masters was posted as a major to Wingate's Chindits, to drop into Burma and harass Japanese communications. The American commander in China, Stilwell, demanded more: he asked for seizure of a strongpoint near the Burma Road, and Masters was ordered with his brigade to hold a hill code-named 'Blackpool', a low spur rising above the paddies and jungle. For seventeen days and nights the Japanese bombed, strafed and shelled the position, killing hundreds, wounding more, slowly reducing the redoubt to bloody mud. When he finally gave the dazed order for withdrawal, Masters had also to order the shooting of nineteen stretcher-cases too horribly wounded to be moved. When he was flown out, back to India, he found that the husband of the woman he loved had divorced her, naming him as co-respondent, and headquarters in Delhi wished to know what cause Major Masters might offer why he should not be called on to resign. . . .

The system in fact had broken down, unable to deal with modern love or modern war, as by 1945, faced with the Bengal famine, the rising tide of resistance, the hostility of Hindu and Muslim, the century-old Raj itself was breaking down. Mr Masters prefers to say it had come to an end. His book closes with a brilliant, rousing description of the Indian Army's advance south at the end of the war from Mandalay:

This was the old Indian Army going down to the attack, for the last time in history. . . . As the tanks burst away down the road to Rangoon and the torrent of guns and radios and trucks and machine-guns swirled and roared past in one direction, south, past the bloated Japanese

corpses, past the ruins of the empire the Japanese had tried to build here, it took possession of the empire we had built, and in its towering, writhing dust clouds India traced the shape of her own future. Twenty races, a dozen religions, a score of languages passed in those trucks and tanks. When my great-great-grandfather first went to India there had been as many nations; now there was one—India; and he and I and a few thousand others, over two and a half centuries, sometimes with intent, sometimes in miraculous sympathy, sometimes in brutal folly, had made it.

Of course that is not the whole story. Mr Masters knows it, and wrote *Bhowani Junction* about Partition, the millions killed in the communal massacres of 1947, the chaos our departing eagles left behind. Why else should he have spent the last twelve years weaving, in his new American home (where else could the last good Anglo-Indian go?), his huge myth-cycle of historic apology? What he has been pouring out from there has been his faith, against all fact we know to the contrary, that British India was for the best, and we desperately would like to believe it. If we could, he would give us back an imperialism purified, made innocent and beneficent; and with it the continuity of virtue, whole and unquestioning, which we have lost. So we go with him, defensively, half-laughing, half-credulous, as he unstitches the history of British India and weaves it afresh in untarnished colours, washing out the bloodstains, correcting the motives; backwards through time, releasing Gandhi from his prison, countermanding the the order to fire at Amritsar,

smoking out the Kipling wives from their hot-weather enclaves of scandal and privilege, undoing the Mutiny reprisals, cancelling the instructions for the greasy bullets, returning the Koh-i-noor from Victoria's crown; all the way back until we are sailing once more for Coromandel, nothing but help and promise in our cargo, the Asian faces smiling from the shore in welcome and trust.

FRANCIS HOPE

THE LIFELINE by Hugo Charteris.
(Collins. 18s.)

HOUSEHOLD GHOSTS by James Kennaway.
(Longmans. 16s.)

Life in remote parts of Scotland, it seems, is as weird as ever; and has produced, this year, two novels definitely out of the ordinary run. (The Fiction Consumers' Association is planning a ban on all novels set in London next year; also all novels set partly in Europe and partly in America.) It is, in fact, obvious from the dust-jacket of *The Lifeline* that it will be something unusual: 'arresting', 'original', 'idiosyncratic', 'wayward', and 'unpredictable' are some of the epithets applied to Mr Charteris's earlier work. *The Lifeline* has also managed, of course, to snare somebody into comparing it with Linklater and Compton Mackenzie; which all goes to show that some reviewers merely find out the geographical location of a book ('Mr Durrell's Forsterian evocation of the Alexandrian scene') and then call it a day.

The Lifeline, then, is a piece of High-

land high comedy describing the progress of a huge bearded TV actor who turns from playing Little John in a Robin Hood serial to running an hotel: the main secret of his success is the lifeline, a system of tapping the huge storage casks of a local distillery for free supplies of whisky. The narrative is decorated by some authentically local characters, such as Aeneas McKay Skimbo, a Catholic crofter not quite five feet high and possibly a hundred years old; some fine burlesque scenes, such as the selection of a local Ted for the finals of the Fluach Football Queen contest; and Mr Charteris's well-developed gift for comic hyperbole: ('the signature that followed was like a huge spider's web photographed in the ten-thousandth of a second when it is sucked up by a vacuum cleaner'.) It is wittily, as well as funnily, written.

But this is only half the story. Unlike Mr Linklater or Sir Compton (or Mr Waugh or Mr Amis, or anyone else you are likely to be compared with if what you write isn't marked SERIOUS clearly enough for anyone to read) Mr Charteris produces his comedy as if it were a side-issue; but since the main issue never emerges, he joins the fashionable ranks of comedians who communicate, under the laughs, a sense of appalling unease. The jokes are obviously there to divert us from something too serious, or too plain tragic, to be endured: but what? Tulloch Traquhair, the hero, relapses when left alone into broody uncertainty even about himself:

'What had happened to his two wives? . . . Where did he come from? . . . Who were his people? . . . Where did he go to school? . . . Was he quite sure that he still knew the

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answers? Like heavy snow the years seemed to have covered his tracks as quickly as he made them. Convenient and misleading metaphor! Truer to say he had needed to cross out the past systematically. . . .

The character of his secretary, a broody man governed by his own existential law ("The environment is master, and must be destroyed") is another disturbing factor which might almost have come out of the pages of Camus: but just when the metaphysical suspense becomes unbearable, we are dragged off to another orgy of slapstick; the final effect is like a *coitus interruptus* of the brain. The question of Traquhair's origin is solved in a burst of genealogical absurdity as far-fetched as the coincidences in *Doctor Zhivago*; the hotel survives both the danger of police action and the visit of the Canadian Prime Minister; the secretary destroys a 7½ litre Donizetti without destroying himself; but one is left staring at the mottoes from Nietzsche which Mr Charteris has put on the title-page, with a feeling that the whole thing could only be *explained*, as opposed to merely enjoyed, by a further set of events which must have taken place off stage. For yet another comparison I would suggest Nabokov, who sometimes conveys the same giggly thrill by a barrage of comedy so inconsequent that it can only be a screen for something else; through the fog of elliptical witticisms and elaborately irrelevant incidents, vague 'significant' monsters loom.

Mr Kennaway is ultimately a more straightforward case; but he also favours a deliberately baffling construction, with all the bits filled in in the wrong order, and a plot in which emotional counter-currents and family

revelations (the Household Ghosts of the title) provide a complicated, cross-woven fabric of mystification. And one of his characters, in expounding his theory of 'the obligatory scene' makes exactly the point that I have tried to make in the last paragraph: that in life, as distinct from novels or plays, the really crucial confrontation, the event that explains all others, may never take place at all. Cowardice, chance, or muddle, present us with something like the fragments of an emotional pattern; but the vital piece which the patterns calls for is one which reality never supplies. By his method of narration, Mr Kennaway certainly gets this point across; but I am not so sure in his case that the significance we are meant to glimpse is a really interesting one.

For one thing, I dislike skeletons in family cupboards: I am always left unconvinced by people whose lives are broken by discovering, in full maturity, even who their parents were, let alone what crimes or errors they committed. And belief is not encouraged by the character of the parent himself, an old baronet who did (or didn't) once cheat at cards and was (or wasn't) the object of more than conventional affections from his fellow officers. I am also put off by the tone of Mr Kennaway's major pronouncements, which is one of false stoicism ('. . . the icy tone of someone who not only has the courage to admit to others that he is no good in bed, but braver still, to confess it to himself . . .'), of understatement altogether too hard-boiled for normal critical consumption:

Standing rather vaguely, moving pound notes in and out of his wallet, he added, casually:

'I suppose we'll probably never see

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each other again. That's rather how life works.'

Mr Kennaway is much better when he is not out for an epic effect: his attention to the significant minutiae of behaviour produces some really remarkable vignettes:

'Have you had a bath?'

'Sorry?'

He had taken, lately, to prefacing most of his replies like this, as if he had not quite heard what was said. It gave people the impression that his mind was always occupied elsewhere; that he knew no rest.

It is as if he succeeds most in the areas where he has made least conscious effort. The book is really constructed around four main characters: wife (baronet's daughter), husband, lover and wife's brother; and it is the brother—the least involved in the relationships which make up the theoretical meat of the story—who steals the show. 'Pink' is an unforgettable portrait of failure, with an appropriately Calvinist flavour of predestination about him; he chronicles his own downward progress in a marvellously captured private vernacular, and is finally packed off to an asylum in Aberdeen protesting, to the cousin who drives him to the door: 'In point of fact it's nothing much more than a five-thousand mile check-up. Thirty-fifth year, I am. Oyez.' On the evening of his father's death, he goes down to the bar of the Queen's Hotel for his usual drinking session; and defends himself when challenged with:

'What's the alternative? Pink asks.

Sitting through there watching TV, or sloping off to my own fart-sack half an hour after the scoff?'

For the fascination, if not the pleasure, of this, it is worth putting up with any

amount of Mr Kennaway's throwaway lines.

PETER QUENNELL

THE MEMOIRS OF CHATEAUBRIAND. Selected, translated and with an introduction by Robert Baldick. (*Hamish Hamilton*. 35s.)

CHATEAUBRIAND by Friedrich Sieburg, translated by Violet M. Macdonald. (*Allen & Unwin*. 35s.)

A good many years ago, I happened to be looking through a large collection of miscellaneous correspondence, addressed to the celebrated Madame de Lieven at a time when she and her husband occupied the Russian Embassy in London, and picked out, among the letters of statesmen, hostesses and royal dukes, a diminutive visiting card with the simple engraved inscription: *Vicomte de Chateaubriand*. It must have lain there since 1822. How bitterly, I remembered, the ultra-conservative Russian Ambassador had disliked the literary French Ambassador! He reminded her, she told her lover Metternich, of 'a hunchback without the hump'—a reference to the broad ungainly shoulders that surmounted his small and spindly legs. He appeared, she wrote, to be 'carrying his heart in a sling', affected a blasé disillusioned air, and announced that he was bored by intelligent women, although Madame de Lieven herself—or so she and her friends considered—was one of the cleverest women of her day. Chateaubriand's first impressions of Madame de Lieven seem to have been even more unfavourable: she was a 'mediocre creature', he records, with a

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JOHN MURRAY

'sharp, repulsively ugly face'. Worse still, she could only talk of politics. Hers was an assertive, masculine spirit; and, despite his affection for Germaine de Staël, masculine intelligence in women was not a quality he had ever greatly prized. He preferred a blend of beauty and sentiment, of intuitive sympathy and unselfconscious sensual charm.

Above all else, he was a 'woman's man', whose existence passed in a long series of absorbing love affairs. But then, as soon as we begin to define his character, we immediately run up against some contradiction. Chateaubriand was a romantic amorist; and it is impossible to separate his public from his private life. Yet he was also a sternly ambitious careerist, who held—and often mismanaged—a number of important posts. As a romantic adventurer, he had much in common with Byron. But, apart from his few parliamentary speeches, Byron never attempted to play an influential public rôle; while Chateaubriand served his country under three successive French sovereigns: Napoleon — to whom he renounced his allegiance after the government's judicial assassination of the innocent young duc d'Enghien—and Louis XVIII and Charles X, once the Bourbon monarchy had replaced the Empire. In 1823 he became French Foreign Minister, an opportunity he had always coveted. This, however, proved a somewhat unfortunate episode, which again revealed his contradictory leanings. Although he had fought as an anti-revolutionary patriot with the 'Army of the Princes', he later professed to be a passionate liberal. Yet he now launched a war of intervention—'my war', he proudly called it—on behalf of the reactionary Spanish monarch. Ferdinand VII was duly restored to

power; but his own king, who distrusted Chateaubriand's romantic exuberance, quickly gave him his official congé.

The collapse of the Bourbons and the rise of Louis-Philippe completed his extinction as an *homme d'état*. Today we need not regret his ruin, which was both political and financial; having lost his official stipend, he was obliged to live by writing books and pamphlets; and, within the next nine years, he was able to round off the majestic autobiographical narrative that he had embarked on during the autumn of 1811. Until September 1841 he continued to revise the work. Then, after an expedition à la *recherche du temps perdu* that he had prosecuted for nearly three decades, he composed a valedictory conclusion and put aside his manuscript. There was his past, from his curious childhood in his father's gloomy Breton stronghold: there, too, was the story of modern France as it had unfolded, crisis by crisis, from the far-off period before the Revolution, when the awkward young chevalier de Chateaubriand had attended Louis XVI's royal hunt and had watched Marie-Antoinette—'she seemed delighted with life'—pass by among her bowing courtiers: an immense panorama of men and events and ideas, against a background not only of France, England, Italy and the Middle East, but of the forests of the New World.

In his time, he had faced his contemporaries as courtier, soldier, exile, traveller, universally acclaimed writer and temporarily successful politician. The scope of the book is truly gigantic; yet it is not the fascination of the story itself, but the voice in which the story is told that has given his memoirs their immortality. Echoing from beyond the

grave—*Memoires d'Outre-Tombe* was the title that the ageing writer chose—with an accent, Baudelaire remarked, that is 'half earthly and half other-worldly', Chateaubriand's voice possesses an extraordinary resonance, yet is capable at the same time of the softest and subtlest modulations. He renders the rustle of a dead leaf in the deserted park at Comburg just as delicately and accurately as the thunders of the revolutionary storm; he is lyrical, romantic, ironic, caustic, boldly rhetorical, fiercely eloquent but, if the occasion demands it, nostalgic, evocative and deeply tender. However excited he may be by the tremendous events of his period, Chateaubriand cannot forget that events are shaped by individual human beings; nor does he allow the

reader to lose the sense of his own individual solitude. He remains a solitary, secluded and self-absorbed, in the midst of world-wide stress and turmoil.

Such is the effect that his style produces—a style compact of strength and grace, that reflects, as few other styles have done, the peculiar characteristics of its author's temperament. Can it be reproduced through the medium of a foreign language? Mr Robert Baldick has made a gallant effort, selecting from the massive original work the substance of a single volume, and translating these extracts into easily running English prose. Here and there, one must admit, he employs a somewhat awkward turn. 'Thanks to the exorbitance of my years, my monument is finished', has not a very English ring; and there are



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other passages in which Mr Baldick's translation is too literal to sound altogether natural. At second hand, Chateaubriand's style loses much both of its grandeur and of its delicacy; and, in the choice of passages he has decided to translate, Mr Baldick, I think, often shows a lack of editorial judgement. Why did he include the extended account of Napoleon's career and character and personality—where, as a French editor, Victor Giraud says, '*les Mémoires d'Outre-Tombe, . . . cessent d'être les mémoires de Chateaubriand, pour devenir l'histoire de Napoléon*—and exclude, for instance, his magnificent portrait of the demonic Mirabeau?

'La laideur de Mirabeau, appliquée sur le fond de beauté particulière à sa race, produisait une sorte de puissante figure du Jugement Dernier de Michel-Ange. . . . Les sillons creusés par la petite vérole . . . avait plutôt l'air d'escarres laissées par la flamme. La nature semblait avoir moulé sa tête pour l'empire ou pour le gibet, taillé ses bras pour étreindre une nation ou pour enlever une femme. . . . Je me trouvais à côté de lui et je n'avais pas prononcé un mot. Il me regardais en face avec ses yeux d'orgueil, de vice et de génie, et, m'appliquant sa main sur l'épaule, il me dit: "Il ne me pardonneront jamais ma supériorité!" Je sens encore l'impression de cette main, comme si Satan m'eût touché de sa griffe de feu.'

Yet, on the whole, Mr Baldick's version should gain Chateaubriand many new admirers; and in Friedrich Sieburg's competent biography—though it tells us very little we have not already learned from André Maurois—they will find a workmanlike summing-up of previous

biographical studies. Under the biographer's lens, the hero of the autobiography cuts a somewhat less imposing figure. Chateaubriand, of course, was vain and petulant and egotistical; the women he pretended to love he very seldom failed to make unhappy; and, as Joubert observed—speaking, it is true, of his earlier writings, not of the *Mémoires d'Outre Tombe*—he was a man who lived for himself, but wrote for the benefit of other people. At moments, there is something almost ridiculous about that frail, top-heavy personage, flanked by his acid, ailing wife, to whose virtues in his memoirs he pays a slightly ironic tribute, and by the chorus of adoring 'madams' who ministered to his self-esteem. To admire him as he deserves to be admired, one must return to the pages of his autobiography—not because they conceal or excuse his faults, but because they display the strength of the character in which those faults were ultimately rooted. There he views himself *sub specie aeternitas*, an individual on a gigantic world-stage; passionately self-centred, he is inspired by a vision of life that again and again, while he looks back on the past, lifts him high above his own existence. *Mémoires d'Outre Tombe* he planned as his personal monument, but also as an 'epic of his time'. With its majestic, yet extremely various, style and its rare combination of interested and disinterested feeling, it is one of the major masterpieces of modern European literature.

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T. G. ROSENTHAL

AUSTRALIAN STORIES OF TODAY edited by Charles Osborne. (*Faber and Faber*. 16s.)

THE TILTED CROSS by Hal Porter. (*Faber and Faber*. 18s.)

'The arts of painting and writing, the lonely arts, have prospered in Australia while the more social arts, those that require performances before a collection of people, have not fared so well. Distance and solitude are very largely responsible for this.' Thus Charles Osborne in his introduction to the short stories, making a shrewd hit at both the

nature of Australian culture and the dominant feature of much of her fiction. The temptation to theorize about the influence of Australia's vast distances and the effects of the bush is perhaps too strong to overcome. Certainly one cannot help observing that the major artistic achievements of the only country which is an entire continent, Patrick White's *Voss* and Sidney Nolan's *Kelly* paintings are essentially outdoor works. (Works, incidentally, which deal with outdoor figures—men who are not at home when confined by walls but who are instead only at ease with 'distance and solitude'.) It is not surprising therefore that the majority of these stories are connected with the outdoors, greater or lesser. Cattlemen, trappers, fishermen are the heroes. Even the

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mechanized become hunters in Geoffrey Dutton's *The Wedge-Tailed Eagle* when the magnificent bird is killed by two pilots.

And while one can occasionally see literary influences at work as in E. A. Gollschewsky's *The Salmon* which, with its sensual awareness, its rippling muscles in the sunlight for the man and its joyful pregnancy and delight in the admiration of the other fishermen for the woman, recalls the early Hemingway these are not nearly as important as the country itself. Without their setting and their language these stories would merely be the routine stuff of magazines. Given these two native advantages, however, many of the stories have a gamey flavour which goes beyond any local appeal. *Act of Faith* by John Cantwell could so easily have been just another sentimental story about children having an adventure during a depression. Yet the author has succeeded in giving it a sense of place and time and in particular that peculiar knowingness which is not offensive because it is the product of a rather deliberate Australian quality which one can only call anti-sophistication.

This quality combines well with the feeling for country and for people uncorrupted by European over-education which never degenerates into the folksy but instead consists of a hard-edged intelligence which is all the more welcome because it is never smart. One finds this in the stories by Judith Wright and especially in Peter Cowan's *Journey*, the best story in the collection.

The stories mentioned above are essentially indigenous and, for that reason, take the landscape for granted. There is never any of the rapturous description that one finds in the writings

of a stranger such as Lawrence. The bush does not obtrude as the author of *Kangaroo* knew it to obtrude: 'Yet a stillness, and a manlessness, and an elation, the bush flowering at the gates of heaven.' Rather the bush is unsentimentally ever-present, something of which the writers are aware but which does not obsess them. Which is as it should be and their stories gain by it.

The only two writers represented in this excellent anthology who do not fit conveniently into the pattern are Ray Mathew and Hal Porter. Mathew's two stories are elegant and funny enough to have come from the *New Yorker* and display a wry, almost macabre humour which is strangely inward looking, even self-deprecating. Hal Porter's excursion into a boarding school cruelly exposes the underlying nastiness and, oddly, prepares one for his novel because it has a similar breathlessness of style and a similar cool eye for deformity both mental and physical.

The Tilted Cross is that rare book, a historical novel which can be safely judged as a work of literature and not as simply an excursion into the past which so loses itself in a maze of forsooths that all characters become lay figures and plot a rehearsal of dates and events. Set in and around Hobart in the first half of the nineteenth century it gives a grim picture of an emergent society whose heraldic devices should have been shackles and the cat o'nine tails. The reasons and the manner of England's export of convicts to Van Diemen's land remain a blot on England's imperialist policy far worse than any Amritsar massacre because they represent neither short-sighted expedience nor a temporary loss of nerve but an extended hell of coldly calcu-

lated savagery not easy either to forget or to forgive. Battered on to the convict strata of society were the minor colonial officials who became all-powerful jacks-in-office and the loose scum of adventurers, pimps and publicans who constituted the community of Hobart.

Mr Porter's novel is based on research into the life of a transported painter, Thomas Griffiths Wainewright who, as Judas Griffin Vaneleigh, is one of the key figures and moves, relatively untouched, among the bizarre collection of expatriates who inhabit a tiny world with an enormous capacity for evil. Vaneleigh is accompanied by his devoted shadow the cockney Queely Sheill, a saintly Adonis who, although very much *l'homme moyen sensuel*, remains curiously innocent despite the depravity which surrounds him and in which he participates. He sleeps with a repellent cripple, whose usual pleasures consist in the whipping of her Negro page-boy, out of genuine charity and denies both himself and the predatory Lady Knight the pleasures of her ladyship's bed. Because Lady Knight has an impotent husband and therefore feels acutely the denial of what is granted so freely to her crippled cousin she causes her husband—suitably outraged at the crossing of class-barriers in the bedroom—to have Sheill tried on a false charge. Sheill gets seven years but before he can be sent to the convict settlement dies atrociously from gangrene as a result of yet another disinterested act done for a fellow-sufferer.

In his fascinated juxtaposition of good and evil and particularly in his obsession with suffering and the incorruptibility of those who are truly innocent and those who have stood so much that they cannot be touched because they

are no longer alive Hal Porter recalls Dostoevsky. And if, as it undoubtedly is, this is an impossible comparison from a qualitative point of view one can also mention a more approachable writer, Robert Penn Warren. Here the comparison is much more valid. *The Tilted Cross* is as obviously the result of careful historical research as, say, *World Enough and Time* which it approaches, if not actually rivals, in quality. Both have the feeling not so much for the past—which is what makes the historian—but for the sense of the past which makes the historical novelist. They have the power to take events culled from newspapers and diaries and mould them into a narrative which is in its psychological insights essentially modern while at the same time clothing them in a language at once authentic and exciting. Because Penn Warren was using a language which was part of a long cultural and intellectual tradition *World Enough and Time* is a much smoother, more polished work. He is also a sufficiently controlled writer to keep his poetic instincts in check. Hal Porter has written *The Tilted Cross* in a poet's tongue and has occasionally let his joy of words newly found run away with him.

'From every gin-crib, rum-shack and grog-shop in Hobart Town gushed the bawlings and whinnys, the obscenities vile to the point of innocence, the punctilious blasphemies, of tin-men and their gap-toothed doxies, of spit-curled ostlers and sweaty cocottes, of gin-crazed fan-makers and spewing chaw-bacons.'

On every page there are such passages, some even more over-ripe, others full of a vigorous humanity which rushes one along revelling in Mr Porter's obvious

pleasure in having struck a vein of language completely foreign to the rather limited vocabulary of twentieth-century Australia. 'The hand of the randy sawyer fumbled the bonnet-maker's gape' and similar flights mingle happily with 'Suddenly with Anglo-Saxon abruptness and resolution, the uncircumcised began to jolt and jar from their church bells the advertisement of the birth of Jesus Christ.' The language is still undisciplined but at least it is worth close attention and at least it contains a novel of Dickensian social criticism. But while Dickens's horrors were always faintly genteel Porter's are brutal and unequivocal. Drink and decay are the hallmarks of the destitute who live in the Shades of Hobart while cruelty rules at the big house where Vaneleigh paints the portraits of the ladies. *The Tilted Cross* is a morality without a preacher, a didactic novel in which the teacher never obtrudes. It is an Australian historical novel as far removed from Rolf Boldrewood's *Robbery Under Arms* as that was an advance on the *Boy's Own Paper*. It is not an intellectual's book and it cannot be compared in any way with the work of Patrick White. But patchy and frequently over-ripe as it is it is still a truly exciting and truly Australian book with as much vigour as any ten average native products.

JOHN FULLER

SONG FOR A BIRTH OR A DEATH by Elizabeth Jennings. (*Deutsch*. 10s. 6d.)

TARES by R. S. Thomas. (*Hart-Davis*. 10s. 6d.)

A SMELL OF BURNING by Thomas Blackburn. (*Putnam*. 10s. 6d.)

TIME FOR SALE by Edward Lowbury. (*Chatto and Windus with the Hogarth Press*. 10s. 6d.)

PANTALOON OR THE VALEDICTION by Philip Toynbee. (*Chatto and Windus*. 18s.)

When will the poets again dash forward like hussars? Nowadays they peddle wares as pious and predictable as indulgences, and there is no Luther for miles. If their poems are wrapped up in the right way, no one will complain. Look: Miss Jennings is neat and clear but she is not pedantic; the Rev. Thomas is traditional but he is very honest; Mr Blackburn is in pursuit of the Unknown but he is not difficult; Mr Lowbury is not original but he is not silly. The inclusive anthologies and British Council pamphlets can comfortably deal with them all. The critic can praise without feeling generous. The reader is very happy.

But with none of these four poets do I feel that the poem is the thing itself (except for some early ones of Mr Blackburn's). It may be a versified display of the sensibility. It may be an interesting and original diary jotting. It may even conceal the grit of a real trope among its fleshy folds. But it hardly ever appears inevitable on that linguistic level at which the best poems first attract and convince. Mr Toynbee, in the latest of his periodical evacuations, is nearer the mark, but still the parts are better than the whole. As is the case with minor poets, one finds oneself discussing the writer and not the work. To avoid both this and boring the reader, one must exaggerate praise and blame. Thus, unless one already belongs to the Poetry

Book Society and has therefore received the Jennings and the Thomas as Choices, in which case one need hardly look at reviews anyway, it might be pointed out that these are the two volumes which are worth buying, if one buys at all.

Of the two, Miss Jennings perhaps takes the lead in skill and depth. She is an industrious poet, still, as it were, to come to the boil. One might once have said she was too cool, thoughtful without being full of ideas. Now there is more directness, more imagination in her self-enquiry, as in this opening to 'Stargazers and Others':

One, staring out stars,
Lost himself in looking and almost
Forgot glass, eye, air, space;
Simply, he thought, the world is improved
By my staring, how the still glass
leaps

When the sky thuds in like tides.

A remark of Edwin Muir's about her last book puzzled me when I read it on the dust-jacket ('one knows things after reading it at which one had not guessed before') because I could not very often apply it here. Rather, there is a pleasure to be got out of her innocent attack upon what is not necessarily an original situation or idea at all (for instance, the symbolical and religious suggestions of clowns). Indeed, I find Miss Jennings at her best where she charts some common human feeling, and less interesting in poems about art, religion or the mind. A religious poem is more acceptable if it is less like a prayer or meditation than an oratorio, being most obviously a work of art and therefore positive and not self-conscious.

Self-consciousness does pay dividends in the case of R. S. Thomas, be-

cause, though a parson, he has come to find that matters of religion and art are of very little open use to his verse. He is a poet of the simple life, of the eternal verities as revealed to those who live and work on the land. His attempts to understand the Welsh farmers of his parish and their self-reliance which leaves little room for acceptance of their sensitive minister: this is the stage on which his poetry is set. His best poems move away from this theme towards the idea of enlightenment, or oblivion, and so on:

History goes on;
On the rock the lichen
Records it: no mention
Of them, of us.

I do not think *Tares* is better than the previous books. There are fewer, for instance, of those interesting and rather strange objective and symbolical elements that could be found in *Poetry for Supper* (as in 'The Cat and the Sea'). It is, in fact, very much a sequel to his earlier work. The Rev. Thomas is writing in his maturity, and does not seem likely to change. The tone, easy and almost conversational, but always ready to break into a more measured cadence, is excellently chosen; it lends conviction even where the imagery stoops to the conventional. His search for truth is done with remarkable poise; the fifties, one feels, was a good time for him to flower, and when he writes (in 'Poet's Address to the Businessman') 'Forgive me/The tongue's failure,/In all this leanness/Of time, to arrive/Nearer the bone', we can only feel that he is no further from the bone than many of his smarter fellow-poets, and that his voice is all the more attractive for his not being a *littérateur*.

Both Miss Jennings and the Rev.

Thomas can rush too breathlessly to a close, and are betrayed by glibness, but they are consistent, sympathetic and lively in comparison with Mr Blackburn and Mr Lowbury, who do not in the same way achieve a really characteristic articulation. *The Smell of Burning* is not as good as Mr Blackburn's earlier books. He now seems to lack a fine selectivity and self-criticism. Even some plainer, moving poems (of which 'Felo Da Se' and 'An Invitation' have appeared in this magazine) do not escape a certain muddiness in writing which can generally be observed here. Mr Blackburn has deserted myth, and with it has fled his passion and imagination. He can now write with a multiple and perverse awkwardness of which this is perhaps an extreme example:

Shuddered, I did, to think of men,
Not unlike me, with Hydrogen
Oblivion at their trigger finger
And scant lucidity in anger . . .

His ideas are sometimes not presented at all clearly. One gets the impression, for instance, that his particular treatment of the birth/death analogy which crops up in several of the poems is merely wrong-headed, and one would like to think that Mr Blackburn has a finer imagination than this, because one is reminded of his talents in many successful poems where he is least forced, most clear-headed.

Mr Lowbury is perhaps too clear-headed: one waits for the poems to catch fire. His themes are common: the impact of time and growth. If both myth and science, he asks,

All through; which part would seem
were a lie
The wilder fantasy—

The tempo of your dream?
Or the notion that a cell
Should multiply, then scream,

Then think up heaven and hell?
Mr Lowbury moves skilfully enough on the surface of these ideas, but lacks distinction.

Philip Toynbee's new novel is considered here because it is largely in verse. It is worth stressing, though, that there is a difference between a novel in verse and a long poem (the difference, I think, between *Aurora Leigh* and *Maud*). Mr Toynbee's hero explains his use of verse on the last page: 'Where I'm happiest is in the brief and almost impatient illumination, the partial, momentary vision.' The verse, loose, Eliotian, and surprisingly lively, doesn't bear any formal weight of progression. It is a method, a suitable style for the fragmentary recollections of an old man's boyhood. It does not create its own shape.

Even Mr Toynbee's last two novels could hardly have prepared one for the wordy oddness of this biographical fantasy. Dick Abberville rambles among his memories: a religious Norwegian mother, a remote father, a baby brother to be jealous of, resulting resentment and delinquency, six months on a farm, unpopularity and quasi-fascism at school, and so on. The old man's companion, a young Americanized Norwegian, obviously becomes bored after four days of it, and so the book stops. The knowing prose asides cannot convince us that this warm bath of reminiscence is ironical; it is merely quite real, and its wholeheartedness loses effect by the whole thing continually appearing to be about more than it actually is. One wonders if the content justifies the style.

Here is Mr Toynbee on Christmas:

Created monkeys jumped on the card-
board mountain;

Muffins the best of our daily bread,
Bought in the lamplight, under the
soldier's statue.

The round pattern of an angel's face
on the nursery ceiling,

Rose of soft light above the oil-stove.

or on foetuses:

Pink fishes with the domed heads of
professors. . . .

or on the London Underground:

The blown air reeked of rubber and
sparks

And a mild municipal disinfectant;
Of fagged-out breath and hasty scent,

Warm bodies and clothes.

Perhaps Mr Toynbee mostly writes with an intensified novelist's rather than a poet's eye and mind, and in a way this kind of free verse seems dated, but I found *Pantaloone* readable for its perseverance and descriptive skill. Mr Toynbee indulges in a certain refinement and elevation, but he does not have the answer to the flatness of the 'fifties style; indeed, this is not without its qualities and advantages, but one feels that some larger gesture is needed than either Miss Jennings or the Rev. Thomas provides. Poetry must not be merely honest, nor merely lively; it must build constructively upon the imagination.

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Contributors

HUGH NISSENSON was born in New York in 1933. Some of his stories have been published in the United States. This is his first publication in England. ALEXANDER BAIRD, born in Liverpool in 1925, served with the RAF during the war. He has since had two novels published, and at present is teaching in Japan. ANGUS STEWART is 24, and went down from Oxford this summer. A number of his stories appeared in *Isis*. He is at present at work on a novel. TONY TANNER is a Research Fellow of King's College, Cambridge. LORD SUDELEY is now at Worcester College, Oxford. LAWRENCE TOYNBEE was born

in London in 1922. He exhibits at the Leicester Galleries and elsewhere, and teaches at Oxford School of Art and Ruskin School. JOHN DOUGL PRINGLE was, for a time, editor of the *Sydney Morning Herald*. He is now on the staff of the *Observer*. SIMON RAVEN was born in London in 1927 and educated at Charterhouse and King's College, Cambridge. He is the author of several novels, including *The Feathers of Death* and *Brother Cain*. RONALD BRYDEN is Literary Editor of the *Spectator*.

The answers to JOHN FULLER's four Riddles are: an onion; a ship; bellows; a bookworm. There are no answers given in the Exeter Book: scholars are still in disagreement over the meaning of some of the ninety-odd riddles.

Letter

Narcissus, such a sensitive aspen about his own feelings, can become an asp with regard to the feelings of his friends. In reviewing *The Natural Bent*¹ I forbode to quote the worst instances of this: the cruel passages about Signora Milani and her unfortunate son. It was this much ridiculed lady who introduced Mr Fielden to Berenson, and Mr Fielden was a frequent and privileged guest at I Tatti. And this cheap jibe about Berenson maintaining 'the pose of the scholar, while at the same time making millions out of the dubious association with Duveen' is the result. Enough said. In this case words do fail me, for such vulgarity is not what one expects of a man who poses as an artist.

Harold Acton

¹ *The London Magazine*, April 1961

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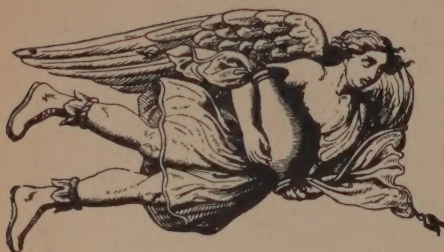
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